# THE PUNISHER RETURNS!

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MIKE ZECK

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PHIL ZIMELMAN

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

# COMICS INTERVIEW

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# UP FRONT

## PUNITIVE MEASURES

The Punisher is back!!

What? You say that the Punisher has had his own monthly books for some time now, and several Punisher graphic novels have hit the Marvel schedule, and the stands! True, but according to a few creative types out there, these versions of the Punisher aren't the same guy that appeared in the Punisher Limited Series — the series that started it all.

They're just someone else.

In this issue of COMICS INTERVIEW, hear Mike Zeck/Penciller, Steve Grant/Writer, John Beatty/Inker and Phil Zimelman/Airbrush Artist, talk about why they think their skull-sporting guy is the definitive mobster mangler. They also talk in detail about their return to that character in the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL: "Return to Big Nothing" for Epic . . . as well as a whole lot more!

— Renee Witterstaetter
Contributing Editor

# CONTENTS

*EDITORIAL:*
**UP FRONT**
*a rap with* renee
3

*WRITER:*
**STEVEN GRANT**
*i write, therefore, i fight — from whisper and psychoblast to the punisher*
5

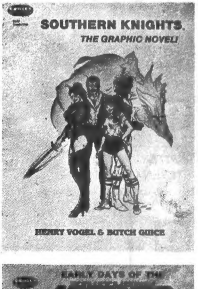
*ARTIST:*
**MIKE ZECK**
*i'm prehensile, therefore, i pencil — mike speaks into the mike about captain america, spider-man & the punisher (& the less said about secret wars, the better)*
14

*ARTIST:*
**JOHN BEATTY**
*i ink, therefore, i am — from acolyte to accredited artisan (bonus: surprise cameo by* john byrne*)*
35

*ARTIST:*
**PHIL ZIMELMAN**
*i paint, therefore, i ain't — the man who's paid to give zeck the brush off*
46

*LETTERS:*
**THE LAST WORD**
*a boonch o'stoof*
59

# SOUTHERN KNIGHTS!

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# "I find the Punisher a difficult character to write."

# STEVEN GRANT

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*Growing up in the turbulent '60s era gave Steve Grant enough writing material to last a lifetime. If that wasn't enough, add to it a desire to actually read twenty-five books a week at one point in his life.*

*And it seems that '60s spirit has carried over to his present life in other ways — among them his intensity, and his belief that communication causes trouble — a good kind of trouble.*

*After all, not everyone can paint pictures with words.*

*Steve probably ranks among the most vocal freelancers out there — especially now with his involvement in "WAR" . . .*

**RENEE WITTERSTAETTER:** *You've just recently finished writing the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL: "Return to Big Nothing". The PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES was a few years ago. This is the first time you've written Punisher since then. Was the character hard to get back into?*

**STEVE GRANT:** A little. I find the Punisher a difficult character to write, because the stories are told from his point of view — and his point of view is not my point of view, so it takes a little mental gear shifting to get to where you see the world like he does. Sometimes it's even hard to jump back out of that mode, but it makes it interesting to write. Once I'm in gear it's easy.

**RENEE:** *What is the Punisher's world view?*

**STEVE:** Basically that we are at war — that the war never ended. It's pretty subtle. That's what THE PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL: "Return to Big Nothing" is about more than anything else — the Punisher's world view.

**RENEE:** *Things happen to him that trigger memories from the past?*

**STEVE:** He does go through a lot of memories from the past.

**RENEE:** *What is your view of the Punisher? What kind of character is he?*

**STEVE:** Extremely solitary. We introduce a new interpretation of the Punisher in this graphic novel. We made the innovation in the limited series of giving the Punisher the identity of Frank Castle, which had never been done before, and which Marvel was against. We finally talked them into it, but they weren't thrilled about giving him an identity. What we do in the graphic novel is take that identity away from him. Not that he isn't Frank Castle anymore, because he is, but that in his point of view, Frank Castle is a different person.

**RENEE:** *Why was Marvel against giving him an identity?*

**STEVE:** It was something he never had. I honestly don't know why they thought it

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1988 First Comics, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

# "The Punisher is a complete psychotic — a clinical psychotic."

## VITAL STATISTICS

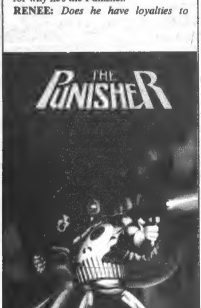
**Name:** Steven Grant
**Born:** 22 October 1953 — Madison, WI.
**Credits:** Hordes of Marvel comics, including THE AVENGERS, THE LIFE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II and THE PUNISHER mini-series. Created and writes WHISPER, PSYCHOBLAST and THE TWILIGHT MAN for First Comics. Edited VELVET LIGHT TRAP REVIEW OF CINEMA, 1978. Film and music critic in Madison, 1977-78, '80-81. Feature writer/reviewer for TROUSER PRESS Magazine, '78-84, now feature writer for VIDEO MAGAZINE. Co-founder/co-editor of WORDS AND PICTURES!, the newsletter for comics freelancers. Write scads of teen adventure novels, notably in the series RACE AGAINST TIME (Dell) and HARDY BOYS CASEFILES (Archway). Contributor to THE NEW TROUSER PRESS RECORD GUIDE (Scribners), DIGITAL DELI (Workman), CLOSE-UPS (Workman), THE ROCK YEARBOOKS 1981 (uncredited) & 1982 (Virgin).
**Influences:** Daniel Kerwin, Michael Alroy, my father, others too numerous to mention.
**Favorite Authors:** William Gaddis, Malcolm Lowry, Thomas Pynchon, Ronald Sukenick, J.G. Ballard.
**Favorite Bands:** Cabaret Voltaire, Can, Elvis Costello, Joy Division, Suicide.
**Favorite Composers:** Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle.
**Favorite Movies:** THE AMERICAN FRIEND, PERFORMANCE, BAD TIMING, TOUCH OF EVIL, PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET.
**Favorite Comic:** BLACK KISS.
**Hobbies:** Predicting the outcome of pro wrestling matches.
**Pet Peeves:** Devil's advocates (why waste time arguing views you don't believe?), would-be censors who masquerade as liberals.

was a bad idea. Their original suggestion was that they could keep coming up with new identities for him. I thought that was pretty ridiculous because he had been in the Marines, so as soon as he was captured, they would have checked his fingerprints against military records. After he was caught in the limited series, they knew who he was, so there was no point in pretending that he wasn't some particular person. On the other hand, he doesn't view himself as Frank Castle, he views himself as The Punisher.

**RENEE:** *Why does he want to be the Punisher? What in his life led him to that?*

**STEVE:** The simple explanation is the Gerry Conway origin for the character which is that his wife and family were gunned down by mobsters and in revenge he put on a costume and vowed to destroy all mobsters. That's the way we've got him — in his "destroy all mobsters" phase. The graphic novel sets it up as little details in his life that make him the way he is. He is a changing character throughout the flashbacks in the graphic novel. He's not a real stable character. Every time we see him, he's sort of in a different mode. When we first see him in the novel, he is a very brash, obnoxious young kid. And then later, we see him in war when he's very much a team player because he's scared to death. He's in the middle of an unnatural situation, and even though he expected to like it, when he's actually in the jungle, he is willing to go along with anything to get out of it. Later on he gets a more noble view of the whole thing. Then, even later, we see him as a family man. Then later as the Punisher in modern day. The connections of this are implied, but the rhythm is a little more staccato. We don't draw direct lines, but we've implied that there are very deep reasons for why he's the Punisher.

**RENEE:** *Does he have loyalties to anyone?*




**STEVE:** NO.

**RENEE:** *He does what he feels is right?*

**STEVE:** Yes.

**RENEE:** *Does he have any inner feelings or is he more of a desensitized character?*

**STEVE:** He is a desensitized character. He works very hard at it. The way that Mike and I do it is that the drawing is very hot. There's a lot of teeth gritting and threatening and wide moves and the interior monologue is very tight and controlled and very unemotional. There's that inner and outer dichotomy. But things keep creeping through. He'd like to think he's a robot — a killing machine. But he keeps having dreams. He can't cut himself off from emotional reactions completely, but he stifles them.

You asked what my vision of the Punisher was. This is it: The Punisher is a complete psychotic, but not in the way that they are portrayed in film/TV/comics — the raving drooling maniac. He's more a clinical psychotic — someone who has a complete disconnection from his emotions. The guy is very cold, very logical, just very disconnected from any gut reaction. His body is capable of gut reaction. If someone is shooting at him, his body will just get out of the way. His body does the physical thinking, and his brain does the long-term planning. His brain is the general, and his body is the grunt.

**RENEE:** *Would he ever be able to live a normal life again?*

**STEVE:** I don't think so. I know they've

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# "The Punisher cannot change. If he does, he is no longer the Punisher."

tried that in the regular monthly books.

**RENEE:** *I was going to ask you about that. There seems to be several versions of the Punisher.*

**STEVE:** That's true.

**RENEE:** *How do you feel about that? Is he being handled incorrectly?*

**STEVE:** Oh, I don't know. I don't read them. It doesn't matter to us. It's irrelevant to us. We don't want to do anything to screw up their continuity, but on the other hand, we really don't feel their Punisher is our Punisher. One of the reasons Mike and I ever wanted to work on the Punisher is that when we got to talking, we had the exact same view of the character. So it's very easy to work with Mike because it's two minds thinking as one on this character.

**RENEE:** *You don't think the Punisher should be a substitute school teacher?*

**STEVE:** No. Personally, I don't think there should be a regular Punisher comic book because that defeats the character. He's not a character that really is built for that kind of thing. The big catch phrase in Hollywood is "a character begins here and ends here" — there's some kind of change. The Punisher cannot change because if he does, then he is no longer the Punisher. And, there's only one plot for the Punisher — Punisher learns of crime/criminal, Punisher chases criminal, Punisher kills criminal. That's his plot.

He's a very rigid character.

**RENEE:** *That makes him sound like he has no humanity left.*

**STEVE:** It's not that he has none left, it's that he can't really recover it for any period of time, or he ceases to be the Punisher. In that regard, he is a very difficult character to write — you have certain restrictions that you don't have with Spider-Man. It limits the plots. For instance, I think one plot in the ongoing series, which I think is a big mistake, was having him with this little squad of hangers-on who create weapons and help him out. Our Punisher is a character who won't accept help. The point of the limited series was that he was a guy determined to go it alone and always find any partner suspect. He doesn't have people making weapons for him. When he knocks over a mobster, he steals money and weapons from them to keep himself going. That's part of his MO. He's pretty pragmatic about it. Using enemies to fund his operations is kind of charming, and we're certainly getting out of Spider-Man territory there.

**RENEE:** *Another difference is that, in the on-going series, he looks younger?*

**Steven's PSYCHO-BLAST (art: Robb Phipps).**

**STEVE:** Right.

**RENEE:** *There are also two more graphic novels being done as well?*

**STEVE:** I think so, I'm not really sure. As I say, all of that is kind of irrelevant to us.

**RENEE:** *Is the Punisher being overused? Will this hurt your graphic novel?*

**STEVE:** It's not going to hurt our graphic novel. He's probably being overused, but that's par for the course in comics.

**RENEE:** *The other versions are just different?*

**STEVE:** Yeah, I can stand that. I'm not particularly doctrinairean about this stuff. As far as Mike and I are concerned, ours is the authentic one, of course. I do feel in a lot of ways they've backed away from things we set up in the limited series, which is unfortunate. It's Marvel's character, though. I'm not going to blame them for going in different directions.

**RENEE:** *They had to expand the character more for monthly books? Change it?*

**STEVE:** To do a monthly book they had to. That's difficult because there's not much change the character can stand. We do a Punisher that is completely removed from the Marvel Universe.

**RENEE:** *No Spider-Man swinging about?*

# "Now personally, I'd like to write the story where the

Whisper — Steven Grant and artist, Rich Larson.

**STEVE:** Right. The closest we came was having the Kingpin as a character in the limited series, and we never see him — he's just referred to. With the graphic novel, we can take him completely out of Marvel territory. With the limited series, we had a few restrictions. If the Punisher were functioning in the Marvel Universe, then all his efforts would be extended toward wiping out the Kingpin, because he's the ultimate level of mob activity in the Marvel Universe. The Punisher would not stop until the Kingpin was dead. Now personally, I'd like to write the story where the Punisher kills the Kingpin. But it's never going to happen because the Kingpin is a character that you really can't kill off in the Marvel Universe. You can't really kill off anyone in the Marvel Universe, which makes it difficult to be the Punisher.

**RENEE:** *Could he use mercy bullets like Doc Savage?*

**STEVE:** The Punisher's idea of a mercy bullet is that he puts it through your head instead of your stomach. The Punisher is a character that doesn't really believe in mercy.

**RENEE:** *He hasn't been exposed to that much mercy during his life?*

**STEVE:** Actually, he's had quite a bit of it, but it's all been taken away from him.

**RENEE:** *Who actually created the*

# Punisher kills the Kingpin. But it's never going to happen."

*Punisher character?*

**STEVE:** Gerry Conway with **John Romita, Sr.** as costume creator, under **Len Wein** as editor.

**RENEE:** *Do you have any idea how Conway expected the character to be?*

**STEVE:** Pretty much what it was when he was writing Spider-Man: The Executioner. I think our Punisher is pretty much what he intended it to be, only taken a lot further. Gerry was under certain restrictions. He had to have things like mercy bullets because people didn't kill people. Heroes certainly didn't kill people in comics.

**RENEE:** *Is the Punisher a hero?*

**STEVE:** I don't look at him as one. I'm not interested in writing heroes. I don't find them interesting.

**RENEE:** *Why?*

**STEVE:** There's a level of irrationality in heroism, the way it appears in comics. I find they stretch my credulity too much. I find it difficult to believe that Spider-Man puts on a costume and goes after the Sandman. This was always a problem I had writing Marvel comics — on certain books, the characters don't make sense.

**RENEE:** *The Punisher wears a costume, too.*

**STEVE:** True, but the Punisher is a completely different character. He's not a hero. He's a psychotic. People may get the wrong idea if I keep saying that. But he doesn't kill innocent people, and he doesn't kill cops. He knows the difference between right and wrong, and he does know that what he's doing is wrong. He also feels that it must be done. To the extent of his being a hero, I see him as a tragic hero. He knows no matter how many criminals he kills, others will rise to fill the ranks. The implication in the limited series is that he knows he cannot win the war, but he still has to go out and fight the battle because that's the only way he can live with himself. To that extent he is a hero because he is fighting a lost cause.

**RENEE:** *Like a martyr, almost?*

**STEVE:** To some extent.

**RENEE:** *Wasn't he basically a background character when you wanted to do the limited series?*

**STEVE:** He was the guy who popped up periodically and blew away a few criminals, got into moral arguments with super-heroes, and escaped. Marvel didn't actually want to do a limited series. I went around from office to office trying to peddle this rough idea I'd had since 1976. It took 10 years to get it off the ground. They thought the Punisher was a character that shouldn't be promoted because he kills people.

**RENEE:** *Now it's one of their hottest characters.*

**STEVE:** Funny how that happened. The interpretations of him had been getting wilder and wilder until they had him running down the street shooting pickpockets and jay-walkers, and ending up in a mental institution. That's so out of character for our character. He couldn't go that way.

**RENEE:** *How did you and Mike get together on the limited series?*

**STEVE:** We worked on a MARVEL TEAM-UP together and had been looking for something else to do. Mike had been drawing SECRET WARS and suffering through that and wanted to really do something to blow off steam. I called him with my idea of the Punisher one day, and he and **John Beatty** had just been discussing doing something with the Punisher. Mike coming on is what got the project off the ground, because at that point, the editors were developing little stables, and everyone wanted Mike in their stable — particularly **Carl Potts**. Carl was willing to take on the series to get Mike, but he was also interested in doing something different.

**RENEE:** *Did you and Mike work together on the story and the plotting?*

**STEVE:** I had a rough notion, and we fleshed it out from there. The first story, in the prison, we developed between the two of us. That's basically the same thing we did on the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL.

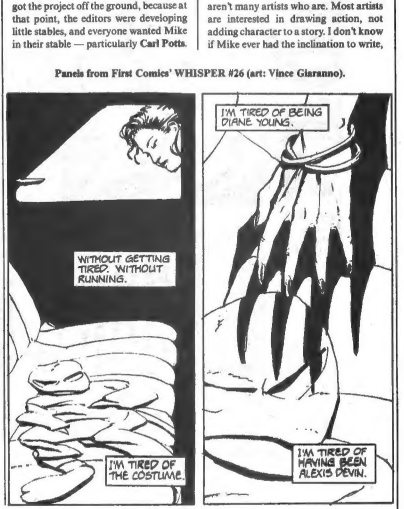
**RENEE:** *Did Mike co-plot the graphic novel?*

**STEVE:** Yes. We met at the Chicago convention one afternoon and came up with the basic idea, and broke it down into pages so we'd know how long it was. Then we went to **Archie Goodwin** at the same convention, and it went from there.

**RENEE:** *Do you prefer working with an artist on a plot, or do you prefer working alone?*

**STEVE:** That depends on the artist. Mike is very gifted in that way. There aren't many artists who are. Most artists are interested in drawing action, not adding character to a story. I don't know if Mike ever had the inclination to write,

**Panels from First Comics' WHISPER #26 (art: Vince Giaranno).**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# "This isn't a guy you want to invite to a bar-b-que."

but he is very good at picking up the elements that make writing worthwhile.

**RENEE:** *How do you think the limited series fleshed out the character, and how will the graphic novel flesh out the character more?*

**STEVE:** In the limited series, the Punisher didn't have an MO, he didn't have a character. We gave him a character — it wasn't a very pleasant character, but it was a character that fit the demands for what he wanted to do. We made him a lot harder that he had been — taking away the mercy bullets. We cut through all the crap that had been overlayed on the Punisher for fifteen years, and brought him more into being a real world character. It made him more of a *noir* character than a comic book one. In the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL, we don't change any of that, but we get much further into his head than most people have been doing. We take the character and explore his attitudes and his past, where he's coming from, how he operates. People may think he's very peculiar.

**RENEE:** *What do you want people to think of the Punisher?*

**STEVE:** I prefer that they were scared shitless. This isn't a guy you want to invite to a bar-b-que. The Punisher should make people very nervous. I hope nobody identifies with him. There aren't many levels on which you *can* identify with him. Writers of the '70s looked at him with a narrow viewpoint. We took the character, turned him around, and looked at him a different way. If there was any innovation in what we did, that was it.

**RENEE:** *How long have you worked in comics, and what other characters have you worked with?*

**STEVE:** I've been around since 1972, when I adapted an Elric story for Windy City Comics. I did some work for Star*Reach. For **Sal Quartuccio**. Then ended up with Marvel. **Roger Stern**, whom I knew, became an editor and I visited him in 1978. He had inherited a book that was eighteen months behind, and wanted to get stories from everyone that he knew. So I wrote one and then I had a check in my hand. At that point, I had been living in Madison, Wisconsin, doing film and music criticism. I was making a semi-decent living, and it was entertaining, but I really couldn't see it going anywhere. Comics looked like a way out, so I took it. I worked at Marvel for six years doing odd stuff, fill-ins that they wanted. I guess I've worked on just about all their characters.

**RENEE:** *Did you find them a fair company to work for?*

**STEVE:** At that point, I didn't have anything to compare them against. I had my problems with them, but then I have a reputation for that.

**RENEE:** *Speaking of that reputation, what is your in involvement with WAP, and why did you think it was a worthwhile endeavor?*

**STEVE:** **Frank Miller, Steve Gerber** and I were all on a computer bulletin board here in California, and were tossing information between ourselves, and realized that a lot of this information would be valuable to freelancers. This is a business where freelancers sort of all exist in their own little void. No communication. We also felt like the freelancer is the unacknowledged hero of the business. We felt they should have more influence. Then the whole deal of the DC rating system came up, which got us all together on one side trying to stop a certain issue in the business. After that was over, we realized that freelancers, for the first time, had actually stopped a company from following through with a policy. That was a shocking notion. We decided that we should let the freelancers know that they had that kind of power. So, WAP was started to facilitate communication among freelancers.

More from TWILIGHT MAN.

# "Growing up in a radical community, you find out

**RENEE:** *What has been the freelancer response?*
**STEVE:** Pretty good. A lot of them are reticent about airing their views publicly, but they all call us up and talk.
**RENEE:** *What has the industry reaction been?*
**STEVE:** Well, I don't know, you'd have to ask the industry.
**RENEE:** *Have you received flak yourself for being involved with WAP?*
**STEVE:** To some extent, but not from anyone I've worked for. Several editors have told me they think it's a really good idea, and hope that we succeed. But those were editors who are in some way or another freelancing.
**RENEE:** *So they know both sides?*
**STEVE:** Right.
**RENEE:** *Then there's the COMICS JOURNAL.*
**STEVE:** That's their business. We don't have anything to do with them.
**RENEE:** *WAP has often been accused of mud-slinging and causing trouble.*
**STEVE:** We're here to cause trouble. Communication causes trouble. The thing the companies have given us the most flak over is our gossip. We're not making up anything. We get our gossip from sources, and we have to hear it from several different people before we print it. I think it's important that people know what people are saying. This is a business which has always thrived on gossip, and if anything we've worked to cut the gossip. There's a lot less of it than when we started, because people don't want it to end up with us.
**RENEE:** *On a different subject, what are the differences in working for Marvel and working for Epic?*
**STEVE:** Working with **Archie Goodwin** is the big difference. He's probably the best editor at Marvel.
**RENEE:** *Why?*
**STEVE:** It's his attitude toward the material. He's got so much experience in comics, editing, and writing, that it all just distilled down into what he is now — a really good editor. He can get straight to the meat of matters. He's very helpful, friendly, and non-pushy. He's a swell guy to work for. Actually, you don't work for Archie, you work with Archie.
**RENEE:** *That makes a difference?*
**STEVE:** That's the big difference between Archie and the other editors.
**RENEE:** *Do you consider yourself a writer or a comic-book writer?*
**STEVE:** I'm a writer. I do lots more than just comics. I do interviews and reviews for VIDEO MAGAZINE, I've been writing HARDY BOYS novels for four years now under the name of **Franklin Dixon.** I do various articles here and there.
**RENEE:** *Did you move to California specifically to pursue writing?*
**STEVE:** Yes and no. I moved to California to get out of New York.
**RENEE:** *That's why a lot of people move to California.*
**STEVE:** It seemed to be the only place that made sense in terms of my career. Although, since I've been out here, I've made no effort to get into movies or television.
**RENEE:** *Why not?*
**STEVE:** I just went different directions. I'm searching for fewer restrictions on my work, not more.
**RENEE:** *There's more creative freedom in comics?*
**STEVE:** That's another yes-and-no question. To some extent there's more creative freedom. In some cases, I don't know if it's more creative freedom, or if it's just less tampering.
**RENEE:** *What in your background made you want to write.*
**STEVE:** I couldn't shave.
**RENEE:** *What?*
**STEVE:** When I'd go into job interviews, I'd always cut myself beforehand. When you have bandaids and cotton stuck on your face, they tend to look at you kind of strange. I finally figured out, I'd have go do something with my life that I wouldn't have to leave home to do. No, actually, I've been writing since the fourth grade. It's always something I've done. I've always read books, too.
**RENEE:** *Who were your inspirations?*
**STEVE:** When I was in high school, I was reading five books a day, twenty-five books a week. After awhile, it kind of all blurs together.
**RENEE:** *If someone wants to write, do you recommend they read a lot?*
**STEVE:** I'd say read as much as possible. But I'd say that to anyone, not just those who want to write.
**RENEE:** *Did your growing-up environment have anything to do with your career choice?*
**STEVE:** Probably. I grew up in Madison, in the year it was nothing but anti-war protests. In high school, we'd go to the riots. I got tear-gassed so many times I didn't feel it after awhile. Growing up in a radical community, you find out the negative things about war and western civilization. I think that had a big impact on my choice of material over the years.

WHISPER #27 Grant & Giaranno.

**the negative things about war and western civilization."**

One-pager from TWILIGHT MAN #2.

**RENEE:** *Growing up during the Vietnam War years was an influence?*

**STEVE:** I'd say that was my single greatest influence — growing up in that place at that time. That had a lot to do with the number of books I read, too, and what I was exposed to.

**RENEE:** *Are you happy with your career choice, or is writing a solitary life?*

**STEVE:** It's a solitary life, but I don't mind. I've always liked being alone. There are periods when you don't have money in the bank, but after awhile, you get very stoic about that sort of thing.

**RENEE:** *What would your dream project be, and do you think you'll ever do it?*

**STEVE:** All projects are dream projects — until you have to do them. The line between dreams and nightmares is a very slender line, and very easy to cross. Or, all projects are dream projects before and after you do them, but the good ones are all dream projects. Writing for me is always like finding my way through the forest perilous. It's not that it's difficult, but all stories have different requirements. Most of the things I'm doing today are dream projects, as far as comics go. THE PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL is a dream project. I loved doing it. I'm also writing WHISPER for First, and that's a dream project when it's done. VORTEX is going to be a dream project if I do it. It's a nightmare history of America from 1963 to date — the hero of which is the man who actually shot **Kennedy.**

**RENEE:** *Do you have more Punisher stuff in your brain?*

**STEVE:** I don't think a lot of stories for the Punisher. At one point I was asked to do a treatment for THE PUNISHER Movie, but I didn't finish before they decided to go ahead. I've got notes for that, that Mike and I are talking about doing something with.

**RENEE:** *So we can look forward to that?*

**STEVE:** Probably. If this PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL does wonderfully for Marvel, I'm sure we'll be doing another one.

**RENEE:** *You more or less have a team going now?*

**STEVE:** I wouldn't want to do more Punisher work unless it was with Mike. And we have **John Beatty** and **Ken Bruzenak**. We loved what Ken did on the limited series, so we've taken to thinking of ourselves as a team. If any one of us is gone, it's no fun as a team anymore.

**RENEE:** *Well, let's hope it's a team that will be around for awhile.*

**STEVE:** Okay!

**"There's not much to shooting, long as you know which end a bullet comes out."**

# MIKE ZECK

*The word "mellow" must have been coined with Mike Zeck in mind, or he picked the word on which to pattern his life. It's evident in that always-ready smile, in the fact that he's not one to throw stones at people he easily could (he has more tact than that), and even in the music he listens to, always relaxing and soothing.*

*He's a man who collects Superman (and other superhero) memorabilia, is a meticulous housekeeper, and likes to work with reggae music reverberating in the background — that or a good movie. And, he's also an artist drawing a character who blows away criminals at every opportunity — without mercy.*

*His opposite, maybe — but somehow it all works — and works well . . .*

**RENEE WITTERSTAETTER:** *Mike, by this time you've done the PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES, THE PUNISHER PORTFOLIO, several PUNISHER POSTERS, several Spider-Man/Punisher covers for MARVEL TALES, and now THE PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL: "Return to Big Nothing." Do folks come up to you at conventions and expect you to look like the Punisher?*

**MIKE ZECK:** I think some of them *do* expect me to look like the Punisher. A few of them seem surprised that the artist sitting behind the table isn't packing a small arsenal of weapons and a skull on his chest.

**RENEE:** *But there was a time when you used to sit around with a gun and a holster at your drawing table?*

**MIKE:** Actually, there was a period like that during the latter Seventies. When I first moved to Connecticut, I lived within five minutes of **Wally Wood's** studio and consquently wound up helping him on a number of projects. When I would arrive at the studio, Woody, **Paul Kirchner** (who was also helping him at the time) and I would take our jackets off and I was the only one not wearing a shoulder holder and pistol. I didn't have to feel inadequate for long, though. After my first job, instead of a cash payment, Woody presented me with a pistol, shoulder holster, speed loader, ankle holster, and so forth. So, from then on, I was

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Michael J. Zeck
**Born:** 6 September 1949 — Greenville, PA.
**Art Training:** Ringling School of Art, Sarasota, Florida.
**First Professional Comics Work:** Inside cover illustrations for Marvel black-and-white magazines, and art for Charlton's horror comics.
**Comic Art Influences:** Ditko, Kane, Kirby, Wood, Kubert, Buscema, Bolland, Adams, Steranko, Williamson, and too many others to list.
**Easiest Assignment:** WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #32, Page 1.
**Toughest Assignment:** Renovating my house.
**Favorite Music:** UB40, Third World, Gregory Isaacs, Steel Pulse, Fine Young Cannibals, Bad Manners.
**Favorite Films:** WILD BUNCH, TAXI DRIVER, RAGING BULL, PREDATOR, BLOOD SIMPLE, TENDER MERCIES.
**Favorite Teams:** Miami Dolphins, and the Power Triangle (The invincible team of Zeck, Morelli and Wohl).

**"I think some of them (the fans) expect me to look like the Punisher."**

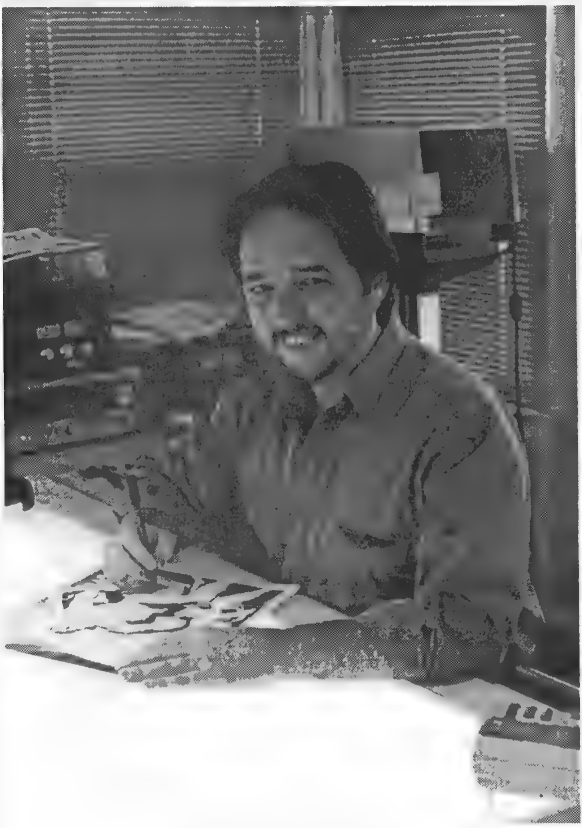

Photo: Frasin Calella

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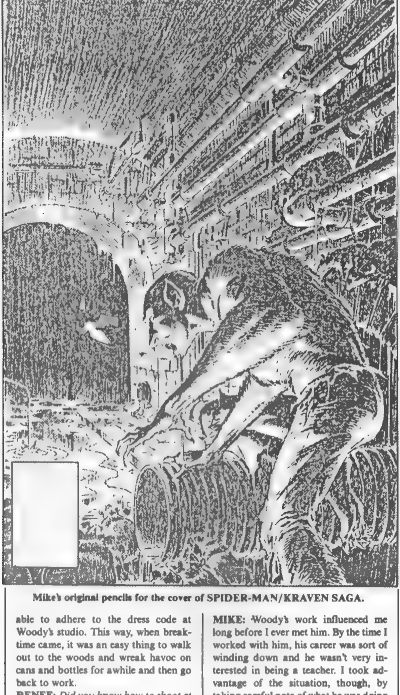
# "I was an anti-establishment, long-haired hippie, so to speak."



Mike's original pencils for the cover of SPIDER-MAN/KRAVEN SAGA.

able to adhere to the dress code at Woody's studio. This way, when break-time came, it was an easy thing to walk out to the woods and wreak havoc on cans and bottles for awhile and then go back to work.

**RENEE:** *Did you know how to shoot at that time?*

**MIKE:** There's not much to shooting, as long as you know which end of the gun the bullet comes out. It was easy enough to point, fire, and cause major destruction. Those were good times.

**RENEE:** *Did Woody help you out in drawing as well?*

**MIKE:** Woody's work influenced me long before I ever met him. By the time I worked with him, his career was sort of winding down and he wasn't very interested in being a teacher. I took advantage of the situation, though, by taking careful note of what he was doing and how he was doing it. I think I came out of it with some valuable information.

**RENEE:** *Well, let's back up a little bit. You were born in Greenville, Pennsylvania. But, you were raised most of your life in Florida?*

**MIKE:** My parents left Pennsylvania when I was five years old and settled in Ft. Lauderdale. For the following 22 years, I was a Floridian.

**RENEE:** *You, like Steve Grant, grew up during the Sixties. Was that an inspiring time for an artist?*

**MIKE:** I don't think that it had any particular effect on my art career. It had more of an effect on my moral and ethical outlook on life and the world around me. I was an anti-establishment, long-haired hippie, so to speak. It was an exciting time of hope and expected change and I think the nation grew up more in that decade than the following two. It's an experience I'll always have great memories of.

**RENEE:** *Were you inspired by the music and art of the Sixties?*

**MIKE:** As far as the music goes, I got into the "underground" sounds of that period. It was irreverent, energetic, and thumbed its nose at social mores. I wasn't too excited about the direction of art, for some reason. Pop Art, Op Art, and Peter Max didn't do much for me. My interest at the time still leaned towards good basic drawing ability. I attended Ringling School of Art from '67 thru '70. With all the trendy art styles that were popular at the time, Ringling held fast to basic drawing ability. They pushed for good basic knowledge before allowing an artist to jump on the trend bandwagon.

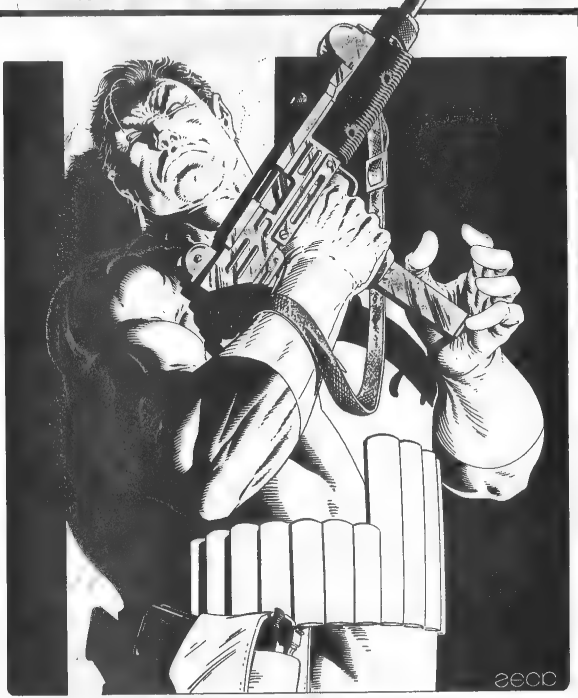
**RENEE:** *Was that a good school to go to for comic-book art?*

**MIKE:** Not for comic-book art, per se. It was a good school to go to if you were interested in learning how to draw. I've never regretted attending Ringling. I still consider it the top art school of the southeast region of the U.S. I took a lot with me when I left there. In terms of comic art, if you were to take a course in comic art, you'd take everything I did at Ringling. The difference is that you'd also have that extra course in continuity, or storytelling — which I didn't have. I was aware of storytelling, though. I picked it up by reading comics, and going to movies with a more critical eye for picking up storytelling through the photographer's lens — I was aware of why they were picking certain camera angles and camera distances. It's the type of thing if you have a critical enough eye, you can pick it up without being taught. In a way, storytelling is something you almost have to have a natural ability to do, like music. In most cases, it's easier to teach someone to draw than it is to teach them to better tell a story.

**RENEE:** *It's something that's harder to explain?*

**MIKE:** Not harder to explain, it's a

**"To me, reggae is a mellow music, which mirrors m[illegible] own tendencies."**



One of the plates from Mike's PUNISHER PORTFOLIO (pencils and inks).

harder thing to learn. There's more of a thought process, a gut feeling involved, than in just learning some muscle groups.

**RENEE:** *While we are close to the subject of music, I know you like reggae music. What appeals to you about that type of music?*

**MIKE:** That's not something that is easily explained — why a certain music appeals to me when something else doesn't. Take *The Big Chill* where you had people who knew each other in their college years, and when they got back together, they were all still listening to the same music as when in college. You take periods in your life that were creative periods — something about the period sticks with you, and so does the music. That music becomes the greatest music in the world, and always will be. It's like the Elvis fans. Through the years, instead of sticking with **Jimi Hendrix** and **The Doors**, I moved on. I can remember even being in a jazz period for awhile. To me, reggae is kind of a mellow music, which mirrors some of my own tendencies, but then at the same time it's pushing the

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# "My feeling was I deserved a Purple Heart for going through the physical."

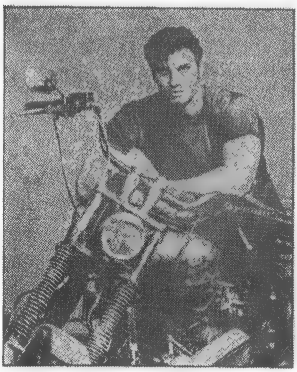
"bass in the face." Reggae has some similarities to underground music of the '60s in that it comes from a segment that sings about rising up against their oppressors. A lot of it is a rebel music that has that same energy and pleas for social change. Let's just say that "I and I like dis riddim."

**RENEE:** *Were you involved in the Vietnam protests?*

**MIKE:** Sure. I was right there, protesting. Me and the rest of the peaceniks saw the war as the political animal that it was. It wasn't a war we were over there to win. I was involved in the first draft lottery at the end of 1969. Of course, my number came up number six out of 365. I knew I was going to be called. My feeling was I deserved a Purple Heart for going through the draft physical. I went to great pains to stay clear of Vietnam, and I did, but that's too long a story to tell here. We'll just say I left the draft physical with a 4-F rating. I didn't have to live the army experience and become all that I could be!

**RENEE:** *Well, backing up even more, when did you know you wanted to be an artist? Did you have your goals set on becoming a comic-book artist?*

**MIKE:** I knew as far back as I can remember. One of my earliest memories is being in the hospital at five years old to get my tonsils removed, and I was in my bed surrounded by comic books. At that time it was *Davey Crockett* and *Roy Rogers* and *Hopalong Cassidy* comics.



**RENEE:** *No super-heroes?*

**MIKE:** I don't remember any at that time. Anyway, from my earliest memory to now, there hasn't been a time that I

**Above: Still of actor Dolph Lundgren as the Punisher (from the movie). Below: Punisher pencils by Mike.**

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# "I thought comic artists were the greatest artists in the world."

wasn't a fan of comic books. At 12 years old, when people asked me what I wanted to be, instead of the normal stuff, I was telling them I wanted to be a comic-book artist. Even at an early age, I had an appreciation of comic-book artists and what they could do. I knew the difference between a fashion artist or a car designer who had to draw the same thing day after day, and a comic artist who had to draw different things every story he got, and draw panel after panel. It was so impressive to me. I thought comic artists were the greatest artists in the world, and in my naive youth I thought artist that could do this were the highest paid artists in the world, too. It took me getting into the business to find that not only was that not true, it was the opposite.

**RENEE:** *Were your parents supportive of your career choice?*

**MIKE:** They understood I had drawing ability, but at that time, the image of an artist was somebody who was starving, probably living off their girlfriend's salary. They weren't that supportive of me jumping into an art career. But that didn't dissuade me from my ultimate goal.

**RENEE:** *I'm sure they feel differently now.*

**MIKE:** Yes, once it became evident that I could make a living doing my hobby, then attitudes changed. My mother worked for the school board as a principal's secretary for a number of years. Once in a while a student would come in, see the last name on her desk plate, and ask if she had ever heard of me. Of course, she would proudly admit I was her son. Also it's not unusual to see them at conventions that I attend in the Florida area. I think they're becoming comic book fans too.

**RENEE:** *What's the first thing you remember drawing?*

**MIKE:** In elementary school I drew superhero figures — Superman, Batman, cowboys, soldiers — you name it. I would draw them and then give them away to other kids in class.

**RENEE:** *Were there any conventions around at that time for fans and aspiring professionals?*

**MIKE:** Not really. About the time I got out of art school, there were actually a few small local conventions in the Miami

I WAS A DENTIST!
YOU'RE MY DOG, SEE?
YOU BARK WHEN I SAY BARK, YOU PETCH! WHEN I SAY "ROLL OVER" YOU ROLL OVER!
YOU ROLL OVER AND PLAY DEAD WHEN I TELL YOU TO!

**Mike Zeck's pencils from Marvel Comics' PUNISHER (limited series).**

# "I was a Spider-Man fan and I liked Captain America

area. I would go to those, and I became aware of this growing market of fans and collectors. Then **Phil Seuling** started doing major conventions in New York. So in 1971, I made my trek to New York to go to one of the **Seuling** conventions on July 4th weekend. That was a cool trip. Me and my good friend, **Kurt Goldzung**, who I had met about a year earlier, and who was also into comics and comic art, decided we were going to do this trip and do it up right. We made our costumes and got our artwork together and made a list of the comics we needed to fill in our collections and drove to New York. It was great. We never saw so many professionals in one place in our life, and we never saw such a big dealers room. One of the best things about it was that we were so meticulous about getting our costumes together that we out-shined everyone else at the costume contest. First Place came down to a toss up between me and Kurt.

**RENEE:** *What did you go as?*

**MIKE:** I went as Black Bolt and received the First Place award. Kurt was Second Place as Deadman. Kurt had the full-face mask. I had the Black Bolt cowl on with my hair tucked inside. You couldn't tell that either one of us had long hair. We both had secret identities while in costume — no one actually knew who we were. The convention was a good experience, and I ended up going to more of those. But I still had breaking in on my mind and I showed my portfolio around, and eventually got work that way.

**RENEE:** *You got work from professionals you met at conventions?*

**MIKE:** Meeting them at conventions was helpful in getting some pretty good critiques. Also there was some interest in my work, and they began to remember me. In 1975, there was a simultaneous occurence. **Roy Thomas**, who was editing SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, saw one of my covers for the ROCKET'S BLAST COMIC COLLECTOR'S MAGAZINE. It happened to be a Conan illustration, and he wanted to buy it for an inside cover of his black-and-white magazine. At the same time, I got a call from Charlton, who was adding some titles to their line and wanted to hire new artists. Being familiar with my sample pages, they gave me a shot. I did mostly horror stories for two years for them, and I did a few more illustrations for Marvel's black-and-white magazines. Charlton ceased publishing new material in 1977, and that's when I figured it was time to seriously look for work from one of the Big Two — Marvel and DC Comics, which were basically doing superhero stuff at that time.

**RENEE:** *Did you want to do superhero work instead of horror work?*

**MIKE:** I enjoyed the horror art. But I did want to do superhero work. I was a Spider-Man fan and I liked Captain America and Superman and Batman. I certainly wanted to do that genre. The Charlton work I had been doing from Florida, but their folding necessitated my move to Connecticut. I decided I needed to be within commute distance from New York to get a foothold in one of the Big Two companies. So I made the move.

**RENEE:** *Was Charlton shredding artwork at that time? Did you save any?*

**MIKE:** They really weren't shredding artwork then. From what I understand, that was the practice some years before. But by the time I started working at Charlton, editor-in-chief **George Wildman**, **Nick Cuti** and **Bill Pearson** saw the value of original art, and were storing it in a portion of the Charlton Building. As a result of that, I was able to get a few of

Captain America cover by Zeck & Beatty (minus the logo & copy).

**and Superman and Batman. I wanted to do that genre."**

Another cover from Marvel's Spidey/Kraven saga (original pencils).

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# "I'd hate to think I had been working for years and didn't get better."

my stories back once they ceased publishing comics.

**RENEE:** *What is it like, looking back at your early work today?*

**MIKE:** It's two things. Number one, it's embarrassing to think I was that bad and still getting assignments. Number two, it's encouraging because I can look at it and feel I've made some advancements since then. I'd hate to think I had been working for years and didn't get any better.

**RENEE:** *When you went to the Big Two, what did you do for them?*

**MIKE:** Some of this actually started before I moved to Connecticut. **Archie Goodwin** had become editor-in-chief at Marvel around 1976, and he sent me a five page try-out story for the color comics — this was actually the first color comics work I did for Marvel. It was a Destroyer story — I think from the CAPTAIN MARVEL series that **Jim Starlin** was working on at the time. They liked my try-out well enough to give me other work. And the Destroyer story ended up being printed as a back-up feature in LOGAN'S RUN #6. I'll tell this to people at conventions when asked, and they'll run over to the dealers room and find copies to buy. An easy purchase, since the LOGAN'S RUN series is fairly inexpensive to pick up. Archie was impressed enough that when a MASTER OF KUNG-FU plot became available, he sent it down to me. The regular artist was missing deadlines, which unfortunately meant that I had to turn the pencils for the story over in about a week. That was a heavy thing to ask a beginner to do, but I just sat down in my garage studio in Florida and started working. I wouldn't quit until I was too tired to work anymore, sleep a little, then get up and start all over again. I at least turned in the story when I was supposed to — even if it didn't get an "A" for draftsmanship, I earned an "A" for meeting the deadline.

**RENEE:** *Hope they didn't expect you to work that fast all the time?*

**MIKE:** It seemed like the next few weren't too much better in the deadline department. More filling-in on the MASTER OF KUNG-FU series. But they started planning fill-ins instead of sending them to me at the last minute. Finally, the book just opened up. The fact that I was the secondary artist on the book already made me the #1 candidate to take over the monthly chores. I was glad to accept. Not only was the KUNG-FU book one of my favorites at the time, mostly because of the **Doug Moench** writing, but I was a big **Bruce Lee** and Kung Fu movie fan.

**RENEE:** *I was going to bring up that you were a big Kung Fu movie fan.*

**MIKE:** I had a lot of cinematic reference behind me to bring to the title. I was sort of visualizing Shang-Chi as **Bruce Lee**, just as **Paul Gulacy** had done before.

**RENEE:** *How long did you stay on that book?*

**MIKE:** I must have done three year's worth of continuity on the KUNG-FU book. After that I felt I'd given it what I had to give. I was ready for a change, and CAPTAIN AMERICA had become available. CAPTAIN AMERICA was really one of my favorite characters. I jumped at the chance to draw that book. There again, that was about a three-year stint.

**RENEE:** *John Beatty was your inker on that book for awhile. John was someone you met through the mail, and you helped his career along. What made you want to do that?*

**MIKE:** That's a hard question to answer. It's been so long ago now since John started writing me letters and sending me

**Mike's pin-up illustration from ACTION COMICS #600.**

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# "Before Beatty was professional he inked around 200 pages of mine."

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samples. What it boils down to is a right place/right time scenario. His letter must have come in one of those rare periods where I didn't have an ultra-pressing deadline in front of me. Where I actually had time to give an answer to a fan letter. He started sending me samples, after awhile I must have seen some potential, so he kept the correspondence going, and I kept sending him pencil Xeroxes so he'd have professional work to practice on. He was persistent, and showed some progression as time went on. As it turns out, I'm glad I did take the time to answer the letter and work with him. He's certainly turned into one of the better inkers in the industry.

**RENEE:** *It's kind of ironic that, after all that, you'd be working on a book together?*

**MIKE:** It's more like the natural flow of things. Before **Beatty** was ever a professional he must have inked around 200 pages of mine. Once he took the trip north to stay at my place and show his samples to the companies, his sample inks were over my pencils. Really I was hoping to get him work at Marvel, but it wasn't readily available. There seemed to be more of an opportunity at DC. That gave him his break-in point, and he took it from there on his own. The nice thing is that he was beholden to me for the help that I gave him, so when I got CAPTAIN AMERICA, I was able to use his gratitude as leverage to get him to ink the book. CAPTAIN AMERICA was also one of his favorites. All that helped me drag him over to Marvel. I'm fairly proud of our run on CAPTAIN AMERICA — I enjoyed it. That was also the beginning of a working relationship with **J.M. DeMatteis** that still exists today.

**RENEE:** *Steve Grant said that you and he matched views on the Punisher immediately. Did you experience that with DeMatteis on CAPTAIN AMERICA?*

**MIKE:** I didn't really have the same feeling as with the Punisher. On CAPTAIN AMERICA, it took a few issues of working together — I feel that our later issues are better than our beginning issues. The more we talked to each other and discussed the character, and got to know each other better, then the better stories we turned out. At the end of the run, we were actually getting together to plot issues a year ahead. But then I was drafted into the SECRET WARS before most of those issues came to fruition.

**RENEE:** *I'm sure you had a choice in that — were you tired of CAPTAIN AMERICA?*

**Portfolio piece of The Batman (No. 6 THE HERO).**

**MIKE:** I'd been on the book quite awhile and I'm not a speedy artist. **Shooter** came to me and talked about SECRET WARS, and it wasn't something I could just fit into my schedule and still do CAPTAIN AMERICA. It had to be one or the other. **Shooter** did a good job of selling SECRET WARS. It sounded like a good project to be on, so I agreed to do it.

**RENEE:** *And you took Beatty with you?*

**MIKE:** What happens with some artists and inkers is that they become identified with each other. When I was asked to do SECRET WARS, **Beatty** became the logical choice to ink it.

**RENEE:** *I asked John a similar question: Do you regret the decision to do SECRET WARS?*

**MIKE:** I can't say I regret it. It was a good news/bad news scenario. It offered exposure because of the copies sold, which in turn led to comfortable royalty checks for the following year, allowing me to take some nice vacations. The only down side was that I had to tailor my art to what **Shooter** was looking for. SECRET WARS was his baby and he had his own rigid view of what he wanted. That took away a little of my own creative input.

**RENEE:** *Why did the artwork on SECRET WARS look different from your art on CAPTAIN AMERICA, or*

# "I got the first one where the Punisher was in prison for 40

Mike Zeck draws Jim Shooter's vision — SECRET WARS (original pencils).

*even what you're doing today?*

**MIKE:** That goes back to **Shooter's** vision of the story. I tried to do what I could to tailor it to what he wanted. Often I failed, in which case I would either have to change panels, or they were just photostatted different ways, or parts of panels might have been changed. I'm not going to be picking SECRET WARS out as the definitive example of my style of artwork! My particular style can be seen in other stories.

**RENEE:** *I heard there were actually inking sessions in hotel rooms to get SECRET WARS out?*

**MIKE:** That's another point — the book was consistently pushing the deadline. In most cases I was working in a breakdown style to get the pages out, and if there wasn't time to get the pages to **Beatty**, other inkers were called in to do backgrounds while John did foregrounds. Every issue had its own set of problems to make the shipping date. When I think

# pages — I couldn't think of anything more fun to draw."

back to it — and I know **Tom DeFalco** and the rest of the crew that worked on it will agree — that it was amazing that we got the books out on schedule. It was nightmarish, but somehow we managed to do it.

**RENEE:** *Shooter sent you and Beatty both a bottle of Dom Perignon when SECRET WARS was over. Beatty still has his on his dresser. What did you do with yours?*

**MIKE:** I don't know why **Beatty's** is still sitting on his dresser! After the SECRET WARS experience, it certainly was a fitting gift, because I needed something just like that. I opened it immediately and downed it.

**RENEE:** *Did the PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES follow directly behind SECRET WARS?*

**MIKE:** That was my next project. **Steve Grant** approached me with the idea, and it was another one of those great things! Number one, the Punisher was a character that I felt had some potential outside of being a supporting character. And, everything Steve told me that he had planned was exactly the way I would have approached the character. I was immediately excited about it.

**RENEE:** *Had you ever drawn the character before? Developed any views about the character?*

**MIKE:** I'd never drawn him before. What few viewpoints I had, Steve tended to mirror them when telling me what he wanted to do with the character. So I said, "Great, let's do it!" It turned out to be a situation where the Marvel plot system worked out very well. Steve plotted up the issues, and I got the first one where the Punisher was in prison for 40 pages — I couldn't think of anything that would be more fun to draw! (Laughter)

**RENEE:** *I bet you had to get a lot of reference for that.*

**MIKE:** I did want to make it as realistic as possible. My initial response was to look up prison references in comic stories that took place in prison. All I found were vertical bars or shadows from bars thrown across the floor. No real reference. After that, I began to haunt the used book stores and even the video outlets for prison movies.

**RENEE:** *Which movies were helpful?*

**MIKE:** ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ — the **Clint Eastwood** movie. It has some great shots of prison cells doors, prison cafeterias, the yard. Beyond that, I rented the old black-and-white movies — the **Cagney** movies. Just for the way they were lit — a kind of mood lighting.

**RENEE:** *What were you going to say about the Marvel plot system?*

**MIKE:** As I got into the story, I had a lot of input concerning the pacing and the look, without changing anything in the plot. Steve's plot inspired me to higher levels, and when Steve got the pencils to script from, I think it inspired him to higher levels. I was real impressed with his dialoguing. That first issue of the limited series is probably one of my favorite works to date.

**RENEE:** *You also did the coloring on that issue?*

**MIKE:** Sometimes when I have that amount of inspiration in a story, I tend to have a definite vision of the look I'm interested in, right down to the coloring. So I took the time to color that issue — but taking the time I did on that first issue set the rest of the books severely behind schedule. I had to pick up speed to the point that I was doing a breakdown style. It suffered after the first issue. It was depressing, in a way, because I thought it was the definitive Punisher story to date. It began with a bang and ended with a whimper.

**RENEE:** *You didn't do the last issue? Were there scheduling problems?*

**MIKE:** I was getting far behind, and **Carl Potts** lost faith that I would finish it before the deadline. So while I was doing issue four, he was conducting a search for a fill-in artist for issue five without me knowing.

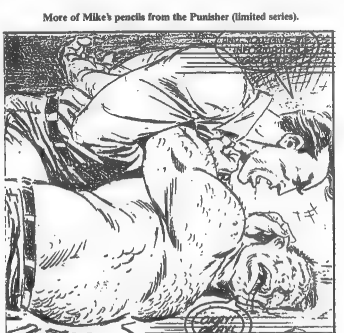
**RENEE:** *That seems odd — to end a series with a different artist.*

**MIKE:** I would have preferred Carl say, "Mike, I loved the first issue. I want each of the remaining issues to look the same. Take all the time you want." But if Carl had said that, I might be supporting him today. He might have lost his job over missed deadlines. So, I can't fault him.

**RENEE:** *Steve Grant feels he's been true to the Gerry Conway idea of the Punisher. Were you true to the Conway/Andru version?*

**MIKE:** **Ross Andru** had the Punisher as an older man with a receding hairline and good build. He was much bigger than Spider-Man. I made an effort to stay true to what had come before, while injecting my personal style, and at the same time trying to give Steve's plots the kind of character they deserved. My version of the Punisher probably comes from a lot of different sources. The Punisher obviously has no super powers, and I had just seen THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES with **Clint Eastwood.** I patterned the Punisher to some extent after the Josey Wales character. Again, here was a normal man who had a host of bad types out to get him. Wherever he went, his reputation went before him. That's the way I pictured the Punisher. A scene in JOSEY WALES that typifies my perception of the Punisher is when he comes upon half-a-dozen soldiers coming out of a general store. They recognize him as Josey Wales, and for a moment

**More of Mike's pencils from the Punisher (limited series).**



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# "In many ways, (Punisher's) a walking dead man."

**Pencil panel from Marvel's SANDMAN limited series, circa 1985.**

they freeze up. They're so intimidated being face to face with him that they're incapable of acting immediately. During those couple of seconds, Wales sizes them up — who has a bag of goods in his hands, whose holster is snapped shut, who has the crazy look in his eye, he knows who to shoot first, second, third, etc. That's like having a super power in some ways. That's why in the limited series, the Punisher is basically going around with sort of an "I can kick your butt" scowl on his face — especially in the prison sequences — because that's how he gains an advantage even when the odds are stacked against him.

**RENEE:** *Do you think the Punisher is any type of hero?*

**MIKE:** Not particularly. I don't see him that way. In many ways, he's a walking dead man. I see him as being killed by the bullets that killed his family — even though he physically lived. He died emotionally. There's something robotic about the way he's declared war on crime — it's like he knows a bullet will also stop him sooner or later, and probably sooner. But he's on auto-pilot to take out as many criminals as possible until the inevitable happens.

**RENEE:** *What do you like about the character?*

**MIKE:** He's not a superhero — there's a basic realism to the Punisher. It's easier for me to get involved in stories and with characters like him, that it is with super-powered characters. It's a matter of personal taste. There's more emotion to the Punisher grabbing Jigsaw's hand and squeezing it around a glass bottle, slicing it up terribly, than there is for Thor to smash someone with his hammer clear through a mountain. There's something more painful about Jigsaw's predicament. It's a gutsy realism.

**RENEE:** *When you went to the Spider-Man/Kraven Saga, did you not enjoy drawing Spider-Man — a super-powered character?*

**MIKE:** That's another case of being lucky. When **DeMatteis** approached me with the plot, I really saw it as the definitive Kraven story and Spider-Man's DARK KNIGHT story. Kraven had never been handled that well in the last twenty-odd years, as far as I was concerned — and I had a chance to draw that story! I took it is a second!

**RENEE:** *Since you'd already developed a working relationship with DeMatteis on CAPTAIN AMERICA, did that aid you on Spider-Man/Kraven?*

**MIKE:** Sure. We'd never really lost contact after CAPTAIN AMERICA, and **DeMatteis** went on to do such spectacular stuff that my respect for his writing has grown even more.

**RENEE:** *You developed the new (now the old) Spider-Man costume during SECRET WARS?*

**MIKE:** That's right. I designed that before SECRET WARS got underway, because **Shooter** had to know the changes that would happen during the series and how that would affect characters in their regular titles. I had to do sketches of the characters reflecting their changes, so that the teams on the regular books could start drawing them. It was an odd scheduling thing. Eight issues before I was able to draw Spider-Man in his new costume, the regular creative teams already were.

**RENEE:** *Was it difficult creating a new costume for such an established character?*

**MIKE:** No, it was kind of fun. I saw Spider-Man as more of a Batman style character in the story — again it was the death of a family member and he was out for revenge and to strike fear into criminal hearts. Most of my sketches had to do with a black costume. Some of them were real off-the-wall, where I was giving him a misshapen head like an insect or like the Alien for the movies. But that was too far out for Marvel tastes, and probably rightly so.

**RENEE:** *Was there any negative mail about Kraven committing suicide? What prompted the epilogue that you and DeMatteis are planning?*

**MIKE:** There was almost no negative mail. There was some talk of the epilogue story soon after the saga. Out of the

# "It's hard to imagine a movie that's completely true to

Pencil panel of Wolverine from SECRET WARS.

hundreds of letters, there were maybe two that took offense that we had a character committing suicide. That inspired **DeMatteis** to slant the epilogue story pertaining to that subject. The series was never meant to glorify suicide. I didn't take it that way and I didn't draw it that way. It was almost a logical ending to Kraven's life. I certainly wasn't saddened that he took his own life — there was something poetic and fitting about it. He'd certainly achieved his goal of 20-plus years and gained honor by doing so, and was able to die with honor. I felt more elation for Kraven than sorrow. In the epilogue story that **DeMatteis** has plotted, and I've been sitting on, it's told from Peter Parker's point of view. The death of Kraven has been bothering him since it happened, as well as the fact that he was shot and buried by Kraven.

**RENEE:** *Recently, you were involved in combining the PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES and the Spider-Man/Kraven Saga into bound volumes. What work did that involve for you?*

**MIKE:** The PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES trade paperback involved coming up with a new cover, which **Phil Zimelman** did an airbrush painting over. After that, it was pretty much Carl's baby. Carl has a very strong design sense — the books that come out of his office reflect that. The Spider-Man/Kraven book is another story. The fact that it was able to be printed as a hard-bound book meant that it could be re-colored on bluelines — meaning that it could be painted and color separated. That lent a whole new dimension to it. I would like to do that with all my books that are printed on good paper in the prestige format. Anyway, I got together with a friend of mine in Connecticut, named **Ian Tetrault**, who's a good airbrush artist, and we got all six issues of bluelines and tried to turn them around as fast as possible, with as good a coloring job as possible. I think that particular story deserved a prestige format.

**RENEE:** *To current matters: When was the germ of the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL conceived, and how did that come about?*

**MIKE:** Steve and I were talking in terms of a graphic novel even when we were working on the limited series, because we were having such a good time with the character. It was a long term discussion until, at one of the conventions Steve and I were at, we sat down and nailed down anything we hadn't covered to that point, and came up with enough of a plot for Steve to flesh it out, type it up and submit it.

**RENEE:** *Was it a natural thing to try to get the whole PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES team together again?*

**MIKE:** There was a certain feeling that it was our limited series that launched the Punisher toward his current popularity. Also, it seemed the Punisher was being taken in directions that we wouldn't have taken him. Which is kind of a funny thing, because the more material Marvel puts out on the Punisher, the more different versions of the Punisher exist.

**RENEE:** *And now there is a Punisher movie coming out with a character that is completely removed.*

**MIKE:** That's almost to be expected. It's hard to imagine a movie that's completely true to the character they're representing. It seems like with some of the popular characters at Marvel, the more different writers and the more different artists you put on a character — which is obviously necessary to put out multiple Punisher books — then you're really getting different versions of the character. That's even happening with Wolverine now. It's kind of a weird feeling to me because I'm spoiled, in a way, by the experience of working with Steve, because we had such a mirrored vision of the character. Now, as a result, I have this very personal vision of him, and I'm kind of biased when it comes to the Punisher. With the graphic novel, we approached it as the next story of this character following the limited series — even though there have been many other Punisher stories between the series and the graphic novel. Those are the other Punishers.

**RENEE:** *They just don't matter, don't count?*

**MIKE:** It's not that they don't count. It's nothing like that. I'm sure there's a host of fans who like the other versions. I'm not trying to say one is better than the other. It's just my own singular, personal vision of the character that I've developed. Steve's version is the Punisher that I tend to identify with.

**RENEE:** *Was it hard for you to get back into drawing the Punisher after not drawing him for so long?*

**MIKE:** Fortunately, the Punisher is one of those characters I really feel like I know. There's a connection. I can get a plot from Steve, read it, and then it's a natural flow to put the Punisher in that situation artistically. Steve's plots are a perfect setting for my Punisher.

**RENEE:** *There were also some deadline problems with the graphic novel?*

**MIKE:** I think all us on the book aren't as fast as we'd like to be. With me, and with **Beatty**, we were putting out a graphic novel that would be hardbound, and the last thing we wanted to do was rush through it and do less than we are capable of doing. Too, it's really our return following the limited series. None of us wanted a similar ending to the graphic novel. One of our reasons to do it was to be able to start and end it with a certain amount of consistency. We've

# the character . . . I have this very personal vision of him."

been able to do that. The graphic novel did get scheduled and for various reasons, not all having to do with the creative team, it's not going to make the original schedule. The business minds at Marvel frown upon these things. But I look at it like I'm a fan waiting out there to buy it, and I'd be willing to wait if it means the product would be better.

**RENEE:** *Is that the way Epic feels about it, too?*

**MIKE:** I know Archie would prefer everything be on time, but there's certainly the desire to put out quality books, and I think that's evident from looking at the Epic line. That's one of the reasons I'm happy to do this book with them. They have a reputation for quality. Again, Archie is one of those people I've admired and respected from way before I was ever in the business. Now he's certainly gained my respect as an editor, too. It's been nothing but a pleasure to do this graphic novel through Epic.

**RENEE:** *You are also controlling the coloring aspects of the graphic novel. Ian Tetrault and Phil Zimelman are doing the interiors. What look are you going for? What are your coloring influences?*

**MIKE:** If anything, my coloring tends to be based on realism. If there's influence at all, it's from sitting in movie theaters and watching television most of my life. The color you see in a movie is based on realism, but it's aided by flood lights and reflected lights. Even the coloring I did on the limited series first issue is a reflection of that.

**RENEE:** *How do you feel the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL fleshed out the Punisher character even more than the limited series?*

**MIKE:** We've gone under the assumption that some time has passed since the story in the limited series. There are some natural progressions that Steve's added to the plot that I'm really enjoying. The neat thing that he's done is, the longer

# "I'm heavily involved with the coloring for the graphic novel."

Frank Castle is the Punisher, the less real his life as Frank Castle seems to him. He's tending now to refer to Frank Castle in the third person. It's becoming such a remote part of him that he sees Frank Castle as another person, another time. I think that's a nice touch in the Punisher's life, given the character. Don't expect our Punisher to acquire new hobbies or join a dating service.

**RENEE:** *You've even gone to the extent of using the same letterer on this book?*

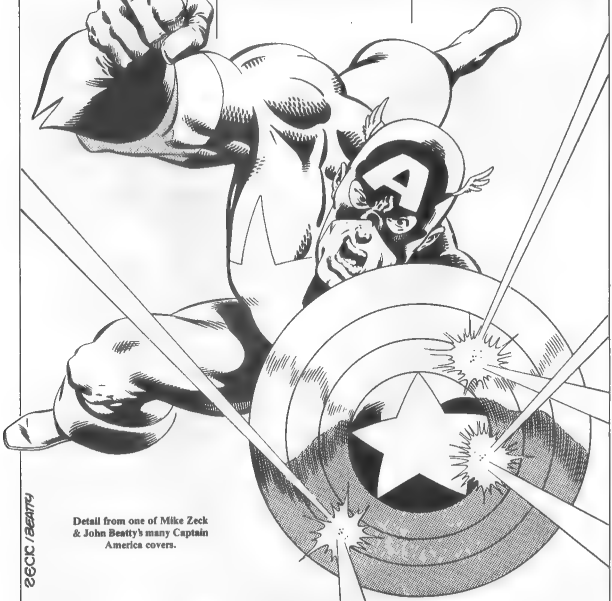
**MIKE:** It was agreed between all of us that we'd prefer to have **Ken Bruzenak** on the team, too. I see Ken, not just as a letterer, but as a letter-artist. He certainly brings a unique style of lettering and sound effects to the stories. I was really impressed with what he did in the limited series. He's as much responsible for the look of the limited series as any of us.

**RENEE:** *What are your future plans? The Epilogue?*

**MIKE:** As we speak, I'm heavily involved with the coloring for the graphic novel so this book can finally come out. Then (I don't know how widely known this is) I had a limited edition signed PUNISHER PORTFOLIO from a French publisher, Editions Deese, with the Punisher as the subject. They've asked for another portfolio featuring the Punisher, so I'm involved in doing the sketches for that. And, of course, there's still the epilogue story for the Spider-Man/Kraven Saga — which I have to get to sometime in the next few months. Beyond that there's nothing concrete — a couple of ideas in the can, but nothing that's ready to be discussed at this time.

**RENEE:** *Do you have any words in closing, Mike?*

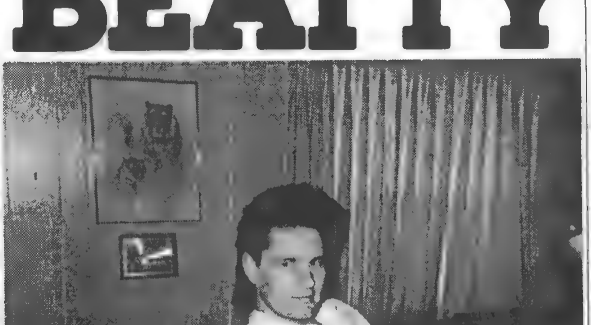
**MIKE:** I hope the fans get as big a kick out of reading this graphic novel as I did working on it. If so, as long as Steve and I are still in this business, the Punisher may strap those guns on yet again!




**Detail from one of Mike Zeck & John Beatty's many Captain America covers.**

**"He (Zeck) thought it (Beatty's inking) showed a lot of potential."**

# JOHN BEATTY



*John Beatty owes his start in this business to a little bit of luck — he wrote the right letter, to the right person, at the right time. From there he backed up luck with persistence, practice and determination. Oh, and let's not forget talent.*

*Through his numerous jobs — many of them inking over Mike Zeck's pencils — Beatty has striven for a certain look, a certain style. And he says his look for the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL is different from the PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES.*

*Being a quick wit and an adventurous guy, you never know what John Beatty is going to say, so . . .*

**RENEE WITTERSTAETTER:** *To start this interview off, let's talk about your past — before and after comics — just to tie a few threads together. There's an interview with Phil Zimelman in this issue, in which he talks about knowing Mike Zeck from the early '70s. But you've known him for a long time as well?*

**JOHN BEATTY:** I hooked up with Mike when I was about 14 or 15 years old.

**RENEE:** *Oh really, how long ago was that?*

**JOHN:** I'm dating myself! But depending on when this interview comes out, my birthday is May 6, 1961 so I'll be 28. Send those cards and gifts everyone!

**RENEE: How did you meet Mike?**

**JOHN:** Through the ROCKET'S BLAST COMIC COLLECTOR — a fanzine at the time. I started noticing these great covers on every other issue. So I wrote a letter to the editor, and he forwarded it to Mike. Mike wrote me back.

**RENEE:** *How did you meet Mike?*

**JOHN:** . It was quite an experience, being a young admirer of Mike's work, to receive a package from him in the mail.

**RENEE:** *What was in the package?*

**JOHN:** Just some copies of the stuff he'd been doing, and a nice letter.

**RENEE:** *How did your correspondence*

All artwork accompanying the interview is © 1989 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

# "If it weren't for him (Mike Zeck), I wouldn't

Before & after (Zeck & Beatty).

*grow from there?*

**JOHN:** I started writing Mike and calling him occasionally. And he'd keep me in xeroxes of what he was doing, and I'd practice inking them on a light box. Then in 1979, he was going to be at the Miami convention. So my friend, **Craig Zablo** and I made the trip to see the famous **Mike Zeck**.

**RENEE:** *This was the first time you met him. Was this during his long-hair period?*

**JOHN:** No, I think he'd just gotten it cut a year or two before that. He had a great tan, though. It was like I was meeting someone I already knew, because we'd been keeping in touch. He told me to come around the table, so I felt like I was already on one side of the table instead of the other, so to speak. I brought samples to show as well.

**RENEE:** *What did he think of your work at the time?*

**JOHN:** He thought it showed a lot of potential — not there yet — but on the cutting edge. He encouraged me, as did **Pat Broderick** and **Bob McCleod**. They were all very instrumental in helping get my work to a professional level.

**RENEE:** *You still live in Florida. What part of Florida were you living in then?*

**JOHN:** In a little town called Holly Hill just between Daytona Beach and Ormand Beach. When I first got in touch with Mike, he was still in Hollywood, Florida. Then he disappeared for about two months, and I got a call one night from him saying he'd moved to Connecticut.

**RENEE:** *How was Mike instrumental in getting you into comics?*

**JOHN:** If it weren't for him, I wouldn't have had quality pencil copies to ink samples on. I'd ink up a batch of those and send him a copy and send **Bob McCleod** a copy. Then I'd give a follow up call and Mike and I would go over the copies. He'd tell me what was good and what was bad, what needed improvement. We worked back and forth like that for a long time.

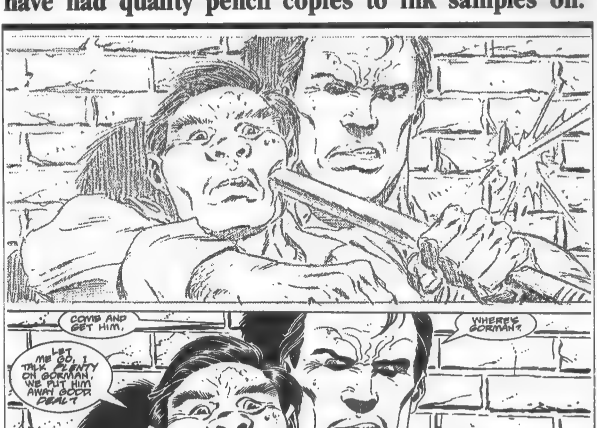
**RENEE:** *How old were you when you first visited the comic companies?*

**JOHN:** Nineteen. At the time I thought I was ready, but when I look back I'm just grateful that I got the work that I did. Mike had been up north for awhile, and knew everyone, so he took me around to the offices. And, Mike was interested in getting me to ink some of his work.

**RENEE:** *Which editors did you see at the time that sounded interested?*

**JOHN:** **Al Milgrom** was the person responsible for looking at samples then.

**have had quality pencil copies to ink samples on."**




**Punisher pencils . . . with the finished inks (Zeck & Beatty).**

He took me aside and gave me some feedback. He also gave me a five page job that **Carl Potts** had pencilled some years before I ever made my trip up there. Carl and I both would hate to see that thing ever printed. That was my try-out. While I was up there, I also did a couple of MASTER OF KUNG—FU covers over Mike, on speculation.

**RENEE:** *Were those used?*

**JOHN:** Those were issues #96 and #98, I think.

**RENEE:** *Wonder whatever happened to that Carl Potts job?*

**JOHN:** It's destroyed, I guess. If not, Carl and I are going to burn it someday . . . if Al doesn't notice it missing.

**RENEE:** *Maybe I'll search for it up at Marvel.*

**JOHN:** Well, if you find it, just mail it here!

**RENEE:** *What was your first book?*

**JOHN:** I did a few things for DC Comics after that — when they had their mystery and horror books. I did around five eight-pagers, and I guess DC liked my stuff pretty well. **Karen Berger** kept trying to get in touch with me, which can sometimes be a task, so she sent me an Express Gram to call her. I did, and she wanted me to ink JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA over **George Perez**. This was on a Friday night, and I was planning a trip to New York the following Monday anyway, so I just told her to hold the pages.

**RENEE:** *Was she taken by surprise?*

**JOHN:** She asked if I was coming up just for the pages!

**RENEE:** *Did you like inking* **Perez**?

**JOHN:** That early in my career, it was a real challenge to do the stuff. It was over his breakdowns. George has a reputation for being difficult to ink, just because of the amount of work he puts into his stuff. I found out that was pretty much true.

**RENEE:** *Did you find him more difficult to ink than Mike?*

**JOHN:** He was doing breakdowns, so there was a little less there, artwise. He wasn't harder to ink. At that point in my career everyone was very hard to ink.

**RENEE:** *Who did you ink on the horror work?*

**JOHN:** **Carmine Infantino**. And I did **Zeck's** first job for DC — a little outer space story. I did one by the late **Don**

# "Shooter gave us a bottle of Dom Perignon after SECRET WARS was over."

**Newton** which I really enjoyed. I don't know if that ever saw print because I've never seen a copy of it. I also did **Keith Giffen**'s first story for DC on his return to comics. That was kind of interesting.

**RENEE:** *Who were you working for, and what were you doing when the PUNISHER limited series came along?*

**JOHN:** After SECRET WARS, I did a three issue run of SQUADRON SUPREME. I knew the PUNISHER limited series was coming up, so I told **Ralph Macchio** that I would ink THE SQUADRON until the limited series began.

**RENEE:** *What point were you at in your career when SECRET WARS came along?*

**JOHN:** Hummm.... is that a loaded question? I must have been in the business three or four years.

**RENEE:** *Did you feel established, at that point?*

**JOHN:** I had been on CAPTAIN AMERICA for two-and-half years. If someone is on a book that long, they establish a reputation for staying on a book and meeting deadlines. Mike and I were both ready for a change, so we decided to take SECRET WARS.

**RENEE:** *Did Jim Shooter approach the two of you for this project?*

**JOHN:** He contacted Mike, and my name was brought up as an inker. Mike called me to ink it, and I accepted.

**RENEE:** *Was that the worst decision of your life?*

**JOHN:** It was either that, or . . . yeah, that could have been one of them. Actually, at the time it was a good decision.

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** John Beatty
**Born:** 6 May 1961 — Whitesburg, KY
**Credits:** JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, SECRET WARS, SQUADRON SUPREME, PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES, THE 'NAM, ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN, SUPERMAN, PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL, and many fill-ins.
**Comic Art Influences:** Al Williamson, Michael Golden, Brian Bolland, Mike Zeck, Serge Clerc, and too many more to mention.
**Favorite Music:** Reggae.
**Favorite Movies:** ROAD WARRIOR, STREETS OF FIRE, ROBOCOP, HIGHLANDER, HEARTBREAK RIDGE, FULL METAL JACKET.
**Favorite Color:** Black.
**Favorite Comic:** None.
**Favorite Comic Strip:** CALVIN & [illegible].
**Hobbies:** Sleeping, book collecting, travelling, movies, music, poker, billiards (with an open challenge to Big John Buscema).
**Role Model and Idol:** Mr. Michael Zeck.

**RENEE:** *When did it turn into a bad decision?*

**JOHN:** After the first issue.

**RENEE:** *What was it like working with Shooter?*

**JOHN:** It's a secret! No, I didn't have to work directly with him. I worked through the editor, **Tom DeFalco**, who would tell me what Jim wanted changed. Or, the stuff would come out and things would already be changed for us. I was in Florida, I wasn't turning in pages and dealing with **Shooter** in person. But, there was a big emotional strain on all of us, and I'm a pretty good case of that. **Shooter** gave us all a bottle of Dom Perignon after it was over. Mine is still on my dresser.

**RENEE:** *Oh really . . .*

**JOHN:** I'm saving it. I'm letting it get even older.

**RENEE:** *Why did he do that?*

**JOHN:** I don't know. It came with a balloon bouquet and a card attached that said, "The War is Over."

**RENEE:** *The personal and the secret war?*

**JOHN:** I don't know. It just said it had ended.

**RENEE:** *Were you prepared for the PUNISHER limited series when it came along, or were you still recovering from the "war"?*

**JOHN:** I had my brief rest. I had those three issues of SQUADRON SUPREME to relax and do the work and not have to look at work I did being printed differently than I had sent it in. I was ready for the Punisher project by all means.

**RENEE:** *Was that a character that you had interest in doing?*

**JOHN:** The Punisher and Captain

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Panel from DC Comics' ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN (#435) by Ordway & Beatty.

# "The graphic novel is more black shapes against white shapes."

America are two of my favorites. It's been satisfying to do work on both of them.

**RENEE:** *By that time, you must have been pretty comfortable working on Mike's pencils?*

**JOHN:** Sure. Mike and I'll get together and discuss what look we want for a certain project.

**RENEE:** *What kind of look did you want for the limited series?*

**JOHN:** At the time, Mike was heavily influenced by **Brian Bolland**. We wanted everything slick and detailed — an over all "polished" look.

**RENEE:** *What look are you going for in the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL: "Return to Big Nothing"?*

**JOHN:** The graphic novel is more black shapes against white shapes. A little more high contrast and less rendered. It'll be done in full-process color and you can do a lot with the colorings, too.

**RENEE:** *Concerning the limited series, I hear there were some pretty strict deadlines, and for whatever reaseon, Mike didn't pencil the last book. Was that a disappointment to you?*

**JOHN:** That was an editorial decision. I would have liked to finish it with Mike. Mike had finished the fourth one and was about to start the fifth before he even heard he wasn't doing the fifth. That came as quite a blow. But I felt obligated to do the fifth. I committed to five, so I did five.

**RENEE:** *Are you a fast inker or a slow inker?*

**JOHN:** I'd have to say slow inker, because I'm so meticulous.

**RENEE:** *Have you always been the same speed?*

**JOHN:** No, when I started out I was even slower. I had a lot of fourteen to fifteen hour days when I only produced one page. Now I've cut that time in half.

**RENEE:** *Has that kept you from getting jobs?*

**JOHN:** It's probably kept me from getting more than one book a month.

**RENEE:** *Are you trying to increase your speed?*

**JOHN:** I'm going to increase it this year, but if the quality of the work suffers, I'm going to have to back off.

**RENEE:** *Do you use mostly pen or brush?*

**JOHN:** I use about fifty-fifty. Mine is a strange process, really. Sometimes I'll start with a brush, and finish with a pen on a particular page, or sometimes I'll do outlining with a pen and do rendering with a brush.

**RENEE:** *What would you recommend for a beginner?*

**JOHN:** First, they should get comfortable using a brush. If they can control a brush, then a pen is easier. When I started out in my fan days, I was a brush inker. Then when I started professional work, I slowly changed to a pen. I found after using a brush I had an easier grasp of the pen.

**RENEE:** *Do tastes in inking styles change in comics?*

**JOHN:** I see a steady change in the comic buyers' diet of what they consider good art. Right now it seems to be art that has too many lines with too little purpose.

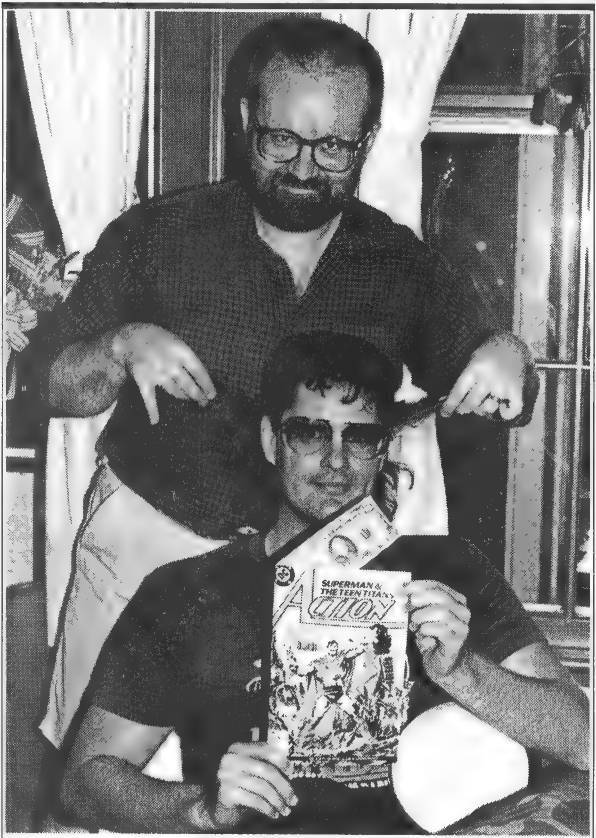
**RENEE:** *When you started, the predominant style was brush?*

**JOHN:** That's a long time ago . . . basically, I've always liked economy in the work. The less done, the less work that goes into a panel or page with it still being exciting, is to me a lot more attractive than a page with a zillion lines and maybe two that mean something.

**RENEE:** *You were at Marvel for awhile before you went back to the DC Comics camp. Why did you return to DC?*

**JOHN:** I was under contract with Marvel for four years, and I had no problem with the contract except that I couldn't work for anybody else. I was just ready to see what was out there. When you're on contract and someone offers you a job, you don't want to ask for details because it might be something you really want to

**"Byrne always had this standing offer for years that if you**




Photos by Andy Byrne

# let him cut your hair, he'd give you $100 . . . Let's do it!"

do. Without a contract I could listen to these new projects. When I went back to DC for my second time — my rebirth — I started right on SUPERMAN with **Jerry Ordway**. Who, by the way, I'm responsible for getting into the business.

**RENEE:** *In what way?*

**JOHN:** Jerry and I had known each other since 1974, '75. I had broken into comics in 1980, and he was doing advertising work. I told him, "Hey, Jerry, you should get into this. This is always what you wanted to do." So he started sending in samples and getting some work, but he still didn't want to give up the advertising job.

**RENEE:** *Something to fall back on?*

**JOHN:** Comics isn't always the most reliable field. Eventually, he decided to give it a full time shot. So I take full responsibility for whatever Jerry is producing today.

**RENEE:** *You're his mentor?*

**JOHN:** Yes, I'm his agent.

**RENEE:** *So, it was Zeck, then you, then Ordway?*

**JOHN:** That's right. I actually had to twist Jerry's arm a bit. So now, when he has deadline pressure, he twists my arm back for getting him into this mess.

**RENEE:** *Jerry is a pretty tight penciller. Was it different inking over his work?*

**JOHN:** Good question. It's not harder, just different. Jerry's style is different. It's really funny how my brain will fool me, sometimes. When inking different people, sometimes a page that looks difficult will be easier than a page that I think will be no problem. Some of Jerry's stuff, although really detailed and well-drawn can be easier than something Mike did that was a big page with one figure. They are both very talented fellows, and they both give an inker good pencils to work from.

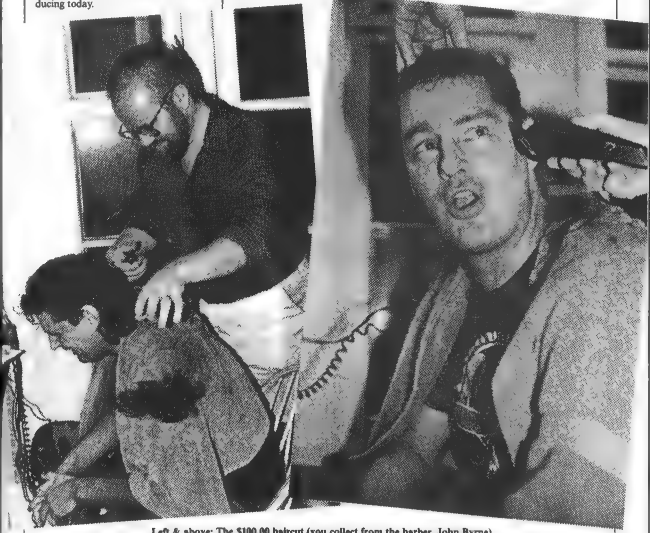
**RENEE:** *I'm sure there have been pencillers you haven't enjoyed?*

**JOHN:** Oh sure.

**RENEE:** *When you get a job and you don't like the pencils, is it harder to get the work done?*

**JOHN:** It really puts the enthusiasm down. Lately I've asked for pencil copies before I accept a job, then I can look at them and tell if I want to ink the job, and if it's something that will keep my enthusiasm up. If the enthusiasm isn't there, it's a waste of time for me to do it because I won't enjoy it, and I'll just struggle through the whole thing.

**RENEE:** *Did you go straight from inking Ordway to inking Byrne?*



**Left & above: The $100.00 haircut (you collect from the barber, John Byrne).**

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# "Bob McCleod was very critical when I first started out."

**JOHN:** Straight to it.

**RENEE:** *So, I hear that Byrne was once your barber?*

**JOHN:** Yes, he gave me a haircut.

**RENEE:** *Why don't you tell us about that in detail.*

**JOHN:** It was around his fourth of July party one year. Byrne always had this standing offer for years that if you let him cut your hair, he'd give you $100. He wanted to do the shaving . . . being the barber that he is. My hair was pretty long at the time — mostly because I hadn't had time to go to the barber. So out of curiosity, I joked, "Hey, John, is that $100 for the haircut still available?" And it was funny because his eyes kind of perked up and his brow rose, and he said, "Why, yes, as a matter of fact, it is. Are you interested?" I said I'd give it some thought and tell him at the end of the day. So throughout the day he had this $100. bill out, and everytime he'd serve me a drink, he'd have that bill right in my face. The day was winding down, and I had to decide one way or another — do it or don't. So I tried to sweeten the deal. I told him I'll ink ACTION COMICS and take the $100. The stipulation would be that he'd have to stay on ACTION as long as I wanted to ink it. He agreed. I was shocked because he was calling my bluff. I kept running my fingers through my hair thinking, "Oh, boy!"

**RENEE:** *Running your fingers through your hair while you still had it?*

**JOHN:** I was thinking this might be the last chance I'd have to run my fingers through my hair for a while. I started walking up the stairs like a death-row convict does to the electric chair, and I got half-way, hesitated, then grabbed the $100 bill and said "Let's do it!" And he actually beat me up the stairs and had the clippers running by the time I got there. He had to take the scissors and clip away at my hair before he could shave it, it was so long. If you've ever seen FULL METAL JACKET, that's the way my hair looked when he was done.

**RENEE:** *So, what was the final deal?*

**JOHN:** That I got the $100 and I was going to ink ACTION and he would stay on as long as I wanted to do it. As soon as that happened, DC changed ACTION to a weekly, so we switched the deal to SUPERMAN. I got two issues done before John couldn't take it anymore and went his on way.

**RENEE:** *His wife Andy chronicled the whole haircut with pictures, right?*

**JOHN:** She did. There exists a photographic essay.

**RENEE:** *Can we order copies?*

**JOHN:** Yes, for $19.95. But wait, don't order yet! You can also get this lock of hair!

**RENEE:** *Is this how deals are forged in the comics industry?*

**JOHN:** Yeah. Actually, he offered me my hair after it was over. I guess I should have taken it to sell, or make inking brushes.

**RENEE:** *That whole episode happened on one of your visits up north. Do you often visit the companies?*

**JOHN:** I'm up there once or twice a year to keep in touch with the companies and see everybody.

**RENEE:** *Do you sometimes feel isolated in Florida?*

**JOHN:** I do. I have a few friends who are

**Mike Zeck and John Beatty.**

# "I like going into the offices to see the editors just

into drawing comics. **Bill Black** is 45 minutes away, and we get together at conventions and trade stories. I have that outlet. But up in Connecticut there are people I don't get to see that often, and I also like New York, and I like going into the offices to see the editors just to let them know that I'm here and I still do work. Over all, I have a good time when I'm up there.

**RENEE:** *I'm sure you made a few reggae concerts too?*

**JOHN:** Sure. Go to a few clubs, go to a few shows, eat at Delmonico's.

**RENEE:** *How has it been working with the Zeck/Grant team again?*

**JOHN:** Great. The story is great. I was reading the story as I was doing the pages, and I really thought it was a good story. It has a lot of great scenes in it.

**RENEE:** *Is it better than the first time this group worked together? Nostalgic?*

**JOHN:** I think the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL is better. It's a complete story — started and finished by the same team. Over all, I look at it and think everyone involved was more comfortable with the character the second time around.

**RENEE:** *How is working with Epic different, or is it?*

**JOHN:** The book was late, but once the book was late, there was no pressure. **Archie Goodwin** understood that instead of rushing the book out and having the last part look terrible, it would be better to give us the time. Let us do our job, let us do it well. The end product is what counts.

**RENEE:** *Epic isn't a deadline cruncher?*

**JOHN:** They want it on time, but when it's beyond the control of somebody, they understand consistency is more important than trying to make up lost time.

**RENEE:** *Is it harder working with a friend? Is Mike more critical of your work?*

**JOHN:** With Steve, we don't know each other that well. We've met and talked, and it's always interesting talking with **Steve Grant**. With Mike, he probably is critical, but that's good. As long as it's helpful criticism, I'm all for it. I did work with **Michael Golden**, who is very critical of work. **Bob McCloud** was very critical when I first started out. He didn't hold any punches. If something was bad, he told me it was bad. It's not telling somebody just that something is bad, they need to tell you why it's bad.

**RENEE:** *Was Mike always honest about your work?*

**JOHN:** Honest. Still is. If I do something he doesn't like, and I'm up there, he'll tell me to erase it and redo it. I have no problem with that. If I'm in Florida, he'll call and say that a certain face is wrong or something wasn't what he had in mind. It's a good working relationship. I'm open to criticism. That's the only way to improve your work. Improve your style, keep the work evolving, perfect. I know perfection will never come, but it keeps it exciting.

**RENEE:** *Phil Zimelman said something similar in his interview — if you think you can't improve, then you won't.*

**JOHN:** Right. If anyone reaches that point, let me know, and I'll give you a kick.

**RENEE:** *Are you an inker that likes to be involved in plotting?*

**JOHN:** Occasionally, I'll get a wild idea for something and I may toss it some-

# to let them know I'm here and I still do work."

body's way — maybe a bit of dialogue or a funny line, a short sequence that I find entertaining. But basically I'll leave writing and plotting to the writer and penciller. Then when I'm inking the pencils, I'll try to stay in touch with the penciller and establish what they're after in an inker. I'll give them my thoughts on how I think something should be inked, or how I would like to interpret their pencils.

**RENEE:** *I once heard Mike joke that he used to be your idol, but that he's not anymore.*

**JOHN:** Well, you know, I was a young impressionable kid. Some people think Mike and I sound alike on the phone.

**RENEE:** *You do.*

**JOHN:** I contribute our voice patterns to me listening to him on the phone for so many years. Mike is still very high on my list, although I've found other people whose work interests me as well. He should still be flattered.

**RENEE:** *Who are some of your favorites now?*

**JOHN:** **Michael Golden** has been one of the tops on my list. The 'NAM work I did with him was very exciting. **Al Williamson**. Of course, **Mike Zeck**. And then **Serge Clerc** and **Yves Chaland**.

**RENEE:** *The European Influence?*

**JOHN:** Simplicity. They have a very simplistic style. **Brian Bolland** is a great artist.

**RENEE:** *Did you enjoy inking Curt Swan in the ACTION COMICS WEEKLY Superman?*

**JOHN:** Not as much as I thought I would. Only because we're from different schools. He was drawing in a lot of shades of gray and I tend to think more in terms of crisp black and white drawing instead of gray. I'm a more design-oriented person.

**RENEE:** *Why did your and Mike's styles mesh so well? Was it because you had worked over his pencils for so long?*

**JOHN:** Probably. I'd say I've inked more of Mike's work than anyone and I definitely got a lot of use out of those xeroxes Mike mailed me. They were invaluable to me.

**RENEE:** *What about penciling?*

**JOHN:** It is something I want to pursue, but it frightens me. I'm looking for a certain excellence that isn't in my reach right now. When I don't see on the page what I envisioned in my head it gets very frustrating.

**RENEE:** *Are you thinking along those lines for the future?*

**JOHN:** I hope so. But it will be awhile yet.

**RENEE:** *What are your future work plans after the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL?*

**JOHN:** I'll be doing RAGMAN at DC over **Pat Broderick**, possibly. There's also a four issue HANGMAN series with Archie Comics, inking over **Kelley Jones**. I was very impressed with what he did with Deadman in ACTION COMICS WEEKLY. From seeing that stuff, I knew I wanted to work with Kelley.

**RENEE:** *You were doing two-pagers in ACTION—Superman over Swan. Was it a hard deadline to meet?*

**JOHN:** It was and it wasn't. The two-page spread format is always hard to me because you've got this huge-looking thing on your drawing table. I would have rather seen it done as two separate pages instead of drawn out as Sunday comics page format.

**RENEE:** *Just to wrap things up, why don't you tell me what some of your past credits are that you are most proud of?*

**JOHN:** I'd definitely have to start with the first issue of THE PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES.

**RENEE:** *Just the first issue?*

**JOHN:** Just the first. It was the highlight of the series. Some of my issues of THE 'NAM with **Michael Golden** — the ones not terribly rushed. I liked the second and third issue of SQUADRON SUPREME over **Bob Hall**. I had a good time with those. And I liked my stint on ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN. And of course, THE PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL: "Return to Big Nothing". Hey, hold on a minute, I've got an incoming call.

**RENEE:** *Sure.*

**JOHN:** I'm back — that was Mike interrupting our interview. I said, "Yeah, Mike, I told them you were responsible for everything."

**RENEE:** *Great. But, this is the last question anyway . . .*

**JOHN:** Yes, I'm single, and I have long hair again. I like Chinese food and reggae music.

**RENEE:** *(Laughter) Do you think there'll ever be another Grant/Zeck/Beatty Punisher Project.*

**JOHN:** If it's available, so am I. I think it's a winning team.

**"I did the covers for the original limited series with Zeck."**

# PHIL ZIMELMAN

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

# "I could work with anyone who is a good penciller."

*Phil Zimelman probably strikes many people as a shy, quiet guy. Looks can be deceiving . . . once you get him talking, he has plenty to say . . . all interesting.*

*Phil is the kind of airbrush artist who will lay paint on a figure as many times as necessary to get that one certain look. He knows in his mind's eye what he wants, and goes after it. That's one of the things that make the Punisher posters, and Phil's other work, so memorable.*

*Besides art, Phil likes movies, working to the music of Pink Floyd, running around New York with his cousin, Marsha, and eating tuna fish sandwiches, cheese enchiladas and Greek food.*

*Phil got his start painting T-shirts in the T-shirt crazy Florida area (and boy, does he have a collection of T-shirts to show off!). And now, to add to his poster and cover credits, Phil can include the interiors of THE PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL, "Return to Big Nothing," and that's what he talks about here . . .*

**RENEE WITTERSTAETTER:** *Okay Phil, while you're sitting there sketching, why don't you tell us what you're currently working on.*

**PHIL ZIMELMAN:** THE PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL: "Return to Big Nothing" for Epic Comics.

**RENEE:** *And what is your part in that?*

**PHIL:** I've airbrushed some of the pages for it, and I also airbrush painted the cover from a drawing by **Zeck.**

**RENEE:** *Are you doing particular scenes in the novel?*

**PHIL:** The flashback scenes and the opening segment, and maybe even one more segment where the Punisher has to go into a whorehouse to wait for the criminals.

**RENEE:** *What other work have you done involving the Punisher character?*

**PHIL:** I did the covers for the original limited series with **Mike Zeck**, and I airbrushed all the Punisher posters.

**RENEE:** *Now, when you and Mike work together in that way, does Mike draw out the poster completely, and you airbrush over his art?*

**PHIL:** I paint directly on the same board where he draws the character — over his pencils.

**RENEE:** *Is that the way you prefer to work?*

**PHIL:** Yeah. That's the best way to work. I've always had trouble painting over my own drawings, so it's nice to work over one of the best pencillers in the business. It's fun and it's a good learning experience.

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Phillip K. Zimelman
**Born:** 21 November 1950 — Norfolk, VA
**Trade:** Airbrushing.
**Credits:** PUNISHER LIMITED SERIES covers, Punisher posters, Captain America poster, Iron Man Poster, PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL cover for Epic, SPIDERMAN/KRAVEN hardbound reprint cover.
**Influences:** N.C. Wyeth, Frazetta, Maxfield Parrish
**Hobbies:** Sketching and reading.
**Favorite Band:** Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Heart
**Favorite Airbrush:** IWOTA HP-C.

**RENEE:** *Working over good pencils teaches you?*

**PHIL:** Most definitely.

**RENEE:** *Are there other pencillers in the business who you want to work with?*

**PHIL:** I could work with anyone who is a good penciller. I just haven't had any offers yet. But if any come along, I'll gladly do them and enjoy it.

**RENEE:** *Why is working over someone else's pencils easier than working over your own?*

**PHIL:** That way I have a set plan. When I'm working over my own stuff I'm apt to change my mind often. With someone else's work, it's there, and I don't have the opportunity to change anything.

**RENEE:** *Do you get as much satisfaction working over someone else's pencils as you do working over your own?*

**PHIL:** Sure. But I've never really thought about it in those terms — as more satisfaction. It just seems to be easier to paint someone else's drawing.

**RENEE:** *Let's talk about airbrush tech-*

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# "I've worked as little as a week and as much as 2-3 months on a piece."

*nique for a minute — for those who don't know about it. What is the airbrush process?*

**PHIL:** Generally, when I get an assignment, I gesso the board — putting on a painting ground. And I just start laying on the areas of paint after cutting the masks.

**RENEE:** *Cutting the masks — is that cutting around the figures, or cutting around certain areas where you are going to put paint?*

**PHIL:** We lay a clear frisket film, with an adhesive back, over the art and cut away areas that get painted. When one area is finished, we replace the film to protect that area from overspray and go to the next area.

**Illustration by Phil.**

## "HIGH CLASS INTERGALACTIC HIGH JINKS"

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# "I've done so many Punisher paintings, I've got the uniform down pat."

**RENEE:** *And you cover areas that are already painted?*

**PHIL:** That's what the frisket is for. You open one area and close the rest. Acrylic paint is a fast drying paint that will allow you to do that.

**RENEE:** *How long does it take you to do a completed piece?*

**PHIL:** That depends on the piece. I've worked as little as a week and as much as two or three months on a piece. I recently did a Spider-Man cover which took approximately a week. That was for the Spider-Man/Kraven reprint book. I guess the longest one I did was the Iron Man poster.

**RENEE:** *Oh really, that just had a figure in the middle — why did that take longer?*

**PHIL:** Doing metal was difficult. I felt I had to make it look like metal, and it just took a lot of doing and redoing.

**RENEE:** *The Punisher isn't that hard to do?*

**PHIL:** No, I've done so many Punisher paintings that I've got the uniform down pat.

**RENEE:** *What was your favorite Punisher painting?*

**PHIL:** The first cover of the limited series. The Punisher is firing off his 45's. What I liked about it was that it took place in an alley with lots of garbage cans and junk flying around and that was fun doing.

**RENEE:** *That's a pretty detailed piece! It took less time to do than the the Iron Man poster?*

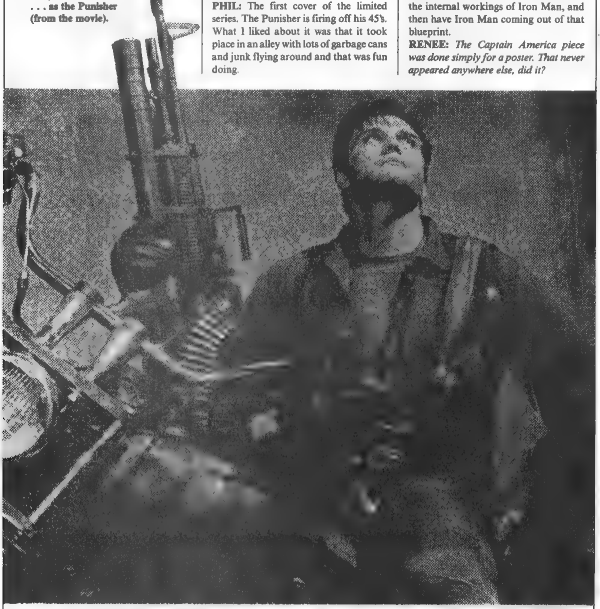
**PHIL:** The Iron Man poster took a long time — not only because I was trying to get the metal correct, but also because we had to wait a long time for the background to be done. Then we had to attach it to the board. Then there were a lot of touch ups. I almost had to do a second painting after the background had been put on.

**RENEE:** *The background resembled a blueprint. Who did that work?*

**PHIL: Elliot Brown.** Mike designed the poster. The original concept was to show the internal workings of Iron Man, and then have Iron Man coming out of that blueprint.

**RENEE:** *The Captain America piece was done simply for a poster. That never appeared anywhere else, did it?*

**Dolph Lundgren . . . as the Punisher (from the movie).**



# "After I'm done with a painting, I need feedback because

**PHIL:** No, that was fun doing, too. It was the first time I ever did a super-hero. Actually, the Punisher isn't a super-hero. He's just a guy trying to make things right. He's just a normal guy who has accumulated a lot of anger. Whereas Captain America is one of the original super-heroes. That, too, was a learning experience for me.

**RENEE:** *Of the characters you've done, which is your favorite?*

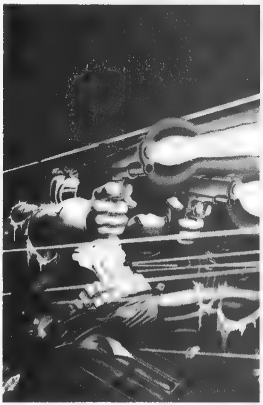
**PHIL:** Definitely the Punisher. When I first started doing the Punisher, I was really leery. Whereas now, I think guns are great to draw and to paint, then I was wondering if I really wanted to portray guns in comic books. I don't see anything really wrong with it now.

**RENEE:** *Why did you think it was wrong then?*

**PHIL:** I don't know if I thought it was really wrong . . .

**RENEE:** *You just had a bad feeling about it?*

**PHIL:** Not really a bad feeling, either. I just wasn't sure if it was proper, because I always thought of comic books as being for kids and I think that's probably a mistake. Comics can be for adults and for kids of all ages. Kids would probably



# I might have missed something or forgotten an area."

enjoy the Punisher, and not be bothered by the guns.

**RENEE:** *Don't you think that's a misconception with a lot of people — that comics are just for kids?*

**PHIL:** Definitely. I wish we could change that, and I think Mike and Steve are doing a good job of turning that around. I don't know how successful any of us can be, though, because you have society putting comic books down — thinking they are trash. I don't know if that can be changed.

**RENEE:** *Do you think the Punisher is a bad role-model?*

**PHIL:** Not really. It's probably not a good idea to take the law into your own hands. But, his idea is right — wrong should be punished.

**RENEE:** *Do you think comics should be coded? Is the Punisher okay for children?*

**PHIL:** When you say children, that depends on the age and the maturity. Two-year-olds aren't going to understand some things. Six-year-olds aren't going to understand other things. Certainly some ages could appreciate the Punisher, and understand the difference between comic books and reality. If they can't, that's the parents' fault. As far as trying to code them, that's censorship, and I'm totally against censorship in any form. Each person should make a choice about what they want to read. That shouldn't be the choice of other people.

**RENEE:** *What about the "For Mature Readers" label?*

**PHIL:** You can tell by a Punisher cover that it's "For Mature Readers." That label doesn't really bother me. But who's to say at what age a person is a mature reader? The parents should guide their child to maturity. It's not Marvel's responsibility.

**RENEE:** *Is it the store owners' responsibility?*

**PHIL:** Not at all. If a parent doesn't want a kid to have something, they can control it. I'm tired of hearing parents blaming other things for their own irresponsibility.

**RENEE:** *In the creative process, do you and Mike consult on how the finished product should look?*

**PHIL:** Oh certainly. I don't think anything is a one-man project. After I'm done with a painting, I need feedback because I might have missed something or forgotten an area. If someone else looks at it, too, they can point out mistakes I might not see. I want the piece to have the best possible look and it's always good to have a second opinion. They say you're supposed to put the painting in a mirror and that way you can see it from a different vantage point. But that doesn't always work. Two people may not always agree, but they certainly have different viewpoints. After working on a piece for a long time, you lose all objectivity. You need a second, or a third person.

**RENEE:** *What kind of working environment do you enjoy?*

**PHIL:** I like to have rock music on. I like **Pink Floyd.** I try to pick up **Pink Floyd** on the radio when they have special shows. I look forward to that. I've tried to have the TV on, but that's just a distraction. The radio seems to be soothing.

**RENEE:** *What time of day do you work — to avoid distractions, and so forth?*

**PHIL:** I never have distractions, because I live alone. When I first started out in the business, it was easier to work at night, and I've just kept it that way the last couple of years. I can't get out of that working habit.

**RENEE:** *What type of art training do you have?*

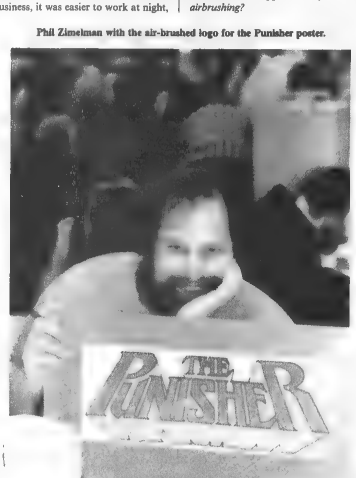
**PHIL:** I'm mostly self-taught. Unfortunately, I never paid much attention in school, so what I've done, I've done on my own.

**RENEE:** *Did they teach airbrush in school?*

**PHIL:** No, I went to a symposium in college that demonstrated airbrush technique. But, when I was in elementary school, I did see a film on airbrushing. When I saw that film, something clicked. I knew that was what I was going to be doing. I knew that from the time I saw that film to the time I went to the symposium.

**RENEE:** *What appealed to you about airbrushing?*

**Phil Zimelman with the air-brushed logo for the Punisher poster.**



## "HIGH CLASS INTERGALACTIC HIGH JINKS"

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**Graphic Album 3**

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—Marvelous Marvin
(The Master Thief)

**Story - HENRY VOGEL**
**Art - MARK PROPST**

**Graphic album**
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**X-THIEVES**
**Graphic Album 4**

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# "I think I was born with a piece of paper in my mouth."

**PHIL:** It just looked neat. The only thing I remember about the film now was a brown pair of shoes. I guess it was a piece of artwork they were showing.

**RENEE:** *It would be funny if you could get a copy of that film now and look at it again.*

**PHIL:** Yeah. It wouldn't be the same. Things never are. Things always seem more magnificent when you are younger. When you mature, you look at it again, and wonder what you liked about it.

**RENEE:** *Yes, but it was a film that influenced your life at the time?*

**PHIL:** It set up my life. Whatever it represented to me at the time was the beginning of my career. It set things in motion.

**RENEE:** *How did you go about teaching yourself?*

**PHIL:** In 1976 I bought my first airbrush. All I did was paint, paint, paint. I constantly practiced until I started getting good at it. Like anything else, it takes a lot of practice.

**RENEE:** *Were the materials expensive for you to buy?*

**PHIL:** The airbrush was a $50 investment, plus $75 for the compressor. Paper was just paper. I think I was born with a piece of paper in my mouth.

**RENEE:** *You were living in Florida at this time?*

**PHIL:** I've spent most of my life in South Florida. But my parents moved around a lot when I was young. I was born in Virginia, then we moved to Brooklyn, then to Miami, then back to Brooklyn, then back to Virginia, then back to Florida for good.

**RENEE:** *Was Florida a conducive atmosphere for creativity?*

**PHIL:** That didn't matter. It was just my desire to do art that mattered.

**RENEE:** *You met Mike Zeck while he was still living in Florida, correct?*

**PHIL:** We met in Florida in 1970. I guess when artists meet, especially when they are just getting started, they hang out with each other. It was something to do. Likes attract, and you have plenty to talk about. I was in awe of Mike's talent at the time. I was amazed that he was so good, because I had never met someone that good at that age. I knew he would go somewhere.

**RENEE:** *This was before he was ever in comics?*

**PHIL:** Yeah. I guess he was born with a brush in *his* mouth.

**RENEE:** *I'm sure he had to practice, too.*

**PHIL:** Mike's a natural. It takes me a long time to do something, but once I have it down, I can do it pretty fast.

**Phil, working on color guides for graphic novel pages.**

**RENEE:** *I've heard some artists say it comes naturally, and others say it takes an effort. You are one of those that have to work?*

**PHIL:** Everything is a struggle for me until I really understand what I'm doing. But I can't see doing anything else. Anyway, I was still taking art courses when Mike moved to Connecticut in the mid '70s. When I graduated, I got work designing T-shirts. That's a big thing in Florida because everyone wears them.

**RENEE:** *Did you design the one you have on: A monkey drinking a stein of beer. That's great.*

**PHIL:** Yeah, I did this one, and I just recently airbrushed it to add some color.

**RENEE:** *How did you and Mike cross paths again — separated by so many states?*

**PHIL:** It's a long, long, long story. But I was out of work at one point and decided to give New York a second try. I had lived here in the '70s trying to break into comics, but wasn't too successful. I didn't have enough samples to show. I came back in 1980 and got a few jobs in art, still keeping in touch with Mike. So Mike called one day saying he was working on a poster, and asked if I wanted to paint it. I said "sure." People liked it. That was the first Punisher poster — the one that sold 458 million copies. The one that everybody in the United States and parts of Russia own.

**RENEE:** *Well, even though you're exaggerating, I do know it was one of Marvel's best selling posters. You sound very proud of it.*

**PHIL:** I am proud of it. Even though I would do the poster differently today, it totally took me by surprise how well that poster did.

**RENEE:** *Did you always have hopes of being in comics?*

**PHIL:** I think basically all kids are comic-book fans. It's the parents who dissuade them. My parents let us have comics, except when money was tight. I always enjoyed the artwork. Early favorites were **Carmine Infantino** and **Gil Kane**, and of course, the Superman artists, **Curt Swan** and **Kurt Schaffenberger.**

**RENEE:** *Why do you think you were led into being an airbrush artist instead of pencilling?*

**PHIL:** Because of that film.

**RENEE:** *I see you still have your sketch book there, and you've started drawing me now. Do you have aspirations to do pencilling as well?*

**PHIL:** Sometime in the future. One thing about painting over good pencils is that it's like eating filet mignon. After that, hamburgers just don't taste so good. Right now, if I were to make the comparison, my pencils are the hamburger. I have a long way to go. It's a little discouraging when I work with Mike's

# "I don't think you can really break into comics unless you do live

**Action figure of The Punisher (not just a toy).**

pencils, because I think I'll never get that good. But when I see his older work, I still have hope.

**RENEE:** *You've seen Mike's work from the Charlton days? He's gotten better with time.*

**PHIL:** Sure. If you reach the point where you feel you can't improve then you are finished. I can't see doing a piece now and doing a piece a year from now and the newer piece not being better. My favorite quote, and I don't know who said it, is when an artist was asked what his favorite painting was, he said, "The next one." The point is that you should always be getting better, or you shouldn't be in the business.

**RENEE:** *I've heard a similar quote attributed to a writer. What's your favorite book . . . "The one I haven't written yet." I'm sure it's true for both. Do you have aspirations to do comic-book coloring?*

**PHIL:** I would want to do it in airbrush, and that would take months and months. Doing what they consider coloring these days is just indicating color on a piece of paper. Not a lot of work goes into something like that. It takes a certain ability to be able to know what colors go where, but that's not painting. I want to do painting. Coloring is coloring. I don't mean to sound snobbish, it's just not what I want to do.

**RENEE:** *What paint are you using on THE PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL?*

**PHIL:** The interiors I'm doing are in acrylic. For me, acrylic is the one thing I paint in. If I make a mistake, it's easy to repair. Unless you feel about acrylic the way I do, you can't really understand it. It's just enjoyable.

**RENEE:** *Some artists use other paints?*

**PHIL:** There's gouache and tempera. They're pretty much the same. Gouache is more finely ground and more expensive. Tempera is really cheap. That's what you use in grade school. Nobody really uses tempera that much . . . except **Andrew Wyeth.**

**RENEE:** *Is tempera durable and long-lasting like acrylic?*

**PHIL:** Egg tempera isn't. Luckily dyes and watercolors are used in comics. I've never used gouache; I don't know what it does. I'm a purist for acrylic.

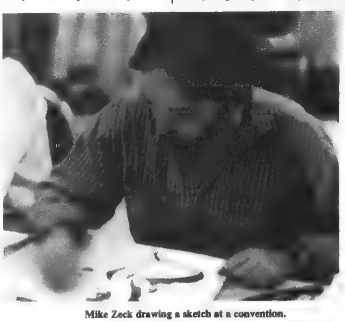
**RENEE:** *What materials would you recommend for the beginning airbrush artist?*

**PHIL:** Everybody is on a budget when they're first starting out. But I recommend a good tool. If you skimp on the airbrush then your work will show it. As for practice you can use ink on the cheapest paper. Tracing paper, newspaper, anything is okay for practice. The only expense should be in the airbrush and the compressor — preferably one that won't disturb anyone else in the house.

**RENEE:** *Are they noisy?*

**PHIL:** Not the one I have. You can get cheap ones that are noisy. There are a variety of compressors. You can even use bottled air, which is silent and cleaner. The only thing I would say is just find time to practice, whatever you get. The key word is dedication.

**RENEE:** *Have you been disappointed with the amount of airbrush work in*



**Mike Zeck drawing a sketch at a convention.**

**here (NYC). Then, after you're established, you can live elsewhere."**

## CAP VS WOLVERINE

## Zeck & Zimelman

*comics? Did you expect more?*

**PHIL:** If I could work faster I could get more work. The work is out there.

**RENEE:** *Are you working on your speed?*

**PHIL:** That's a New Year's resolution of mine — to increase my output. Get more work done. Continue to practice.

**RENEE:** *Did living in New York improve your chances of breaking into comics?*

**PHIL:** I don't think you can really break into comics unless you do live here. Then, after you're established, you can probably live elsewhere. It seems like a lot of time is lost sending things through the mail, too. And the work could get lost.

**RENEE:** *Do you always hand deliver your work?*

**PHIL:** Oh yeah! It's a joy, when I do a good painting, to see people's reactions. It's kind of like when people see a baby for the first time. They ooh and ahh. That's how I feel about my artwork. I don't know how that sounds.

**RENEE:** *You wouldn't want to trust your baby through the postal service or the Fed-Ex system?*

**PHIL:** I don't think so.

**RENEE:** *You're only working at Marvel. Do you have plans to work at the other companies?*

**PHIL:** I wish DC would start having posters of their characters. I'd love to do Batman or Superman. Actually, it would have been fun to airbrush a Byrne Superman.

**RENEE:** *Do you have any future projects planned?*

**PHIL:** I don't have anything lined up. I just take one piece at a time. If I try to plan ahead then I get lost. I need to concentrate on one painting, get it out, then concentrate on something else.

**RENEE:** *Is it going to take you longer to airbrush the inside pages of the PUNISHER GRAPHIC NOVEL? Is that more tedious?*

**PHIL:** Nothing is really tedious about it. It's your attitude toward it. If it gets tedious, then it's time to get out of the business. Whatever I do I try to make it fun. As for the inside of the book it's no different — except the size.

**RENEE:** *You'll be working on a smaller size than for the posters?*

**PHIL:** Most of the paintings are 20x30 inches, except for the first which was 30x40. That's bigger than I like to work. Murals would be fun, but my studio isn't set up for large paintings. 20x30 fits my studio space better. Working small has its advantages because I can work faster. The blue lines will be 10% up from print size. The interiors, of course, are black and white art, so I don't have to worry about lines. That's always a problem with airbrushing because it's an exact science. If you make a mistake between the colors then you have a white line, and there's nothing worse than having a white line. You don't have to have that precision when working with black outlines like we did on the graphic novel.

**RENEE:** *So looking back to that point when you saw that film in school, and thinking about what you've done since, are you satisfied? Are you on the right track?*

**PHIL:** I'm on the right track. But the train has just barely started moving. I can do great things in time. I have a long way to go. But I feel confident that there are better days ahead. I just wish they were a little closer.

**RENEE:** *Do you foresee working with the Punisher character more?*

**PHIL:** Sure, and hopefully with others, as well. Everything is a learning experience. And, what I may not learn from one artist, I'll learn from another.

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**BATMAN'S LIFE IN HELL?**

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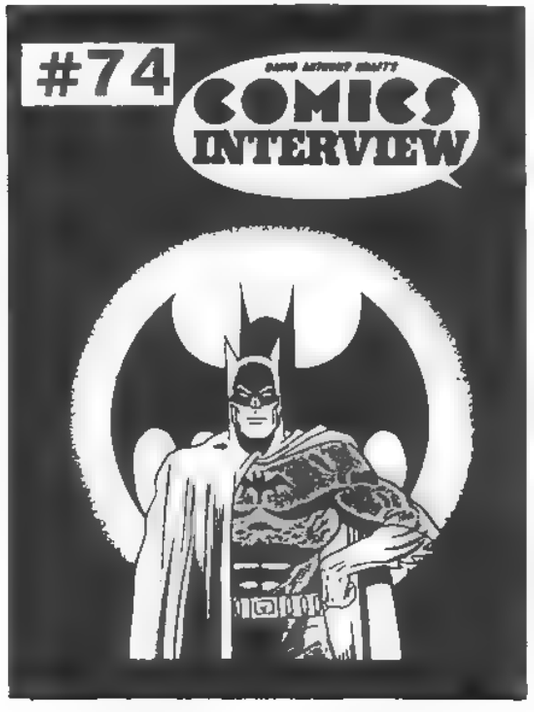


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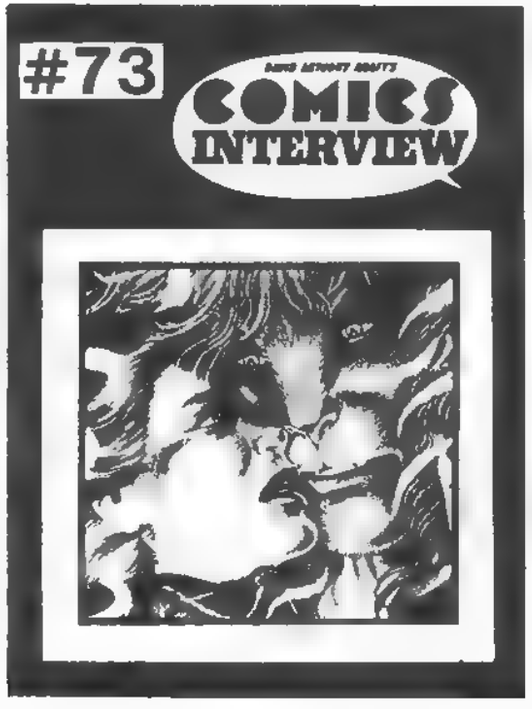


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# LAST WORD

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## FORMER EDITOR PICKS NITS

Dear DAK,

I read COMICS INTERVIEW #67. My favorite piece was the interview with **Roy Thomas; Thomas** strikes me as kind of a wise ass but then so am I, and at least he's interesting. The Mouge did a good job of interviewing him.

**Dawn Geiger** interview was okay; certainly as the former Editor-in-Charge-of-Putting-More-Cheesecake-in-COMICS-INTERVIEW, I approve of photos of fabulous babes in bikinis, and it's always encouraging to see that a woman with 36-24-36 vital stats has something upstairs beyond a good set of headlights. A tip o' the **Chadwick** Stetson to Zim-Zom for getting her into the magazine. Now let's find another excuse to show **Wendy Pini** in her Red Sonja costume.

The **Ron Randall** interview was okay; I just didn't find many of the topics he covered of interest, but not all interviews are going to be of interest to all people. **Mike Gold's** interview covered too many titles I haven't read for me to find it very absorbing, but I thought **Peter Sanderson** did a good job as interviewer; his comments are often as interesting as what the interviewee says.

But what struck me most about issue #67? This:

It's **William Butler Yeats,** begorrah — and **Tom Yeates.** Also, just to be hit-picky, the **Yeats** play **Roy Thomas** refers to is "On Baile's Strand," not "On Bailey's Strand," although the pronunciation of "Baile" is, I believe, the same as "Bailey." I can see where **Dave** ("The Kraut") **Kraft** and **Lou** ("the Frog") **Mougin** might screw up "Baile," but to misspell the surname of the foinest poet to come out of the Emerald Isle . . . it's enough to make any self-respecting son of the Ould Sod want to blow up a bus full of English schoolchildren.

Bill Chadwick
76 Twelfth St. Apt. 8
Atlanta, GA 30309

P.S. Also, please tell Henry I liked his "pro-gun" (actually "pro-freedom") editorializing.

*It's your own darn fault, Bill ("the Mick"). If you were still editing INTERVIEW, none of this would ever have happened. So maybe it's yourself who should be bombed (come to think of it, given your ethnic bias, you probably are bombed).*

*— DAK*

## SEX AND VIOLENCE (GOT YOUR ATTENTION?)

Dear DAK:

Since Capital Distribution, Inc.'s ADVANCE COMICS doesn't have a letter column, I guess your mag is as appropriate a one as any to address this remark to

The August issue of that august publication (sorry!) contains the following solicitation, under the Aircel heading in the black & white comics section. I quote verbatim:

"LEATHER AND LACE (Adult Version) #2, $2.50. Adults only. Pamela Wilde and Christine Nguyen run into peril at every turn as the evil Vaughn Stratton plots his revenge. Nudity and sexual situations. By Barry Blair.

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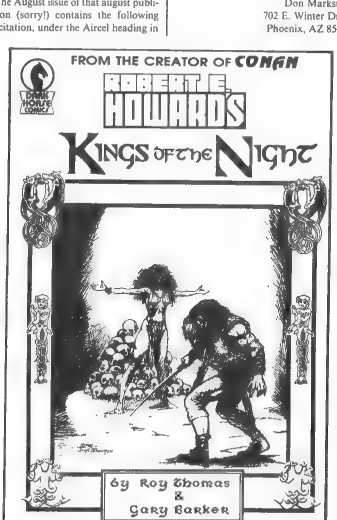
I'm sure some pithy comment is called for, but I am dumbfounded.

Don Markstein
702 E. Winter Drive
Phoenix, AZ 85020



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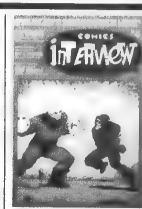

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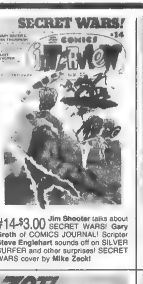


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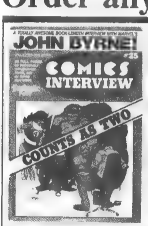


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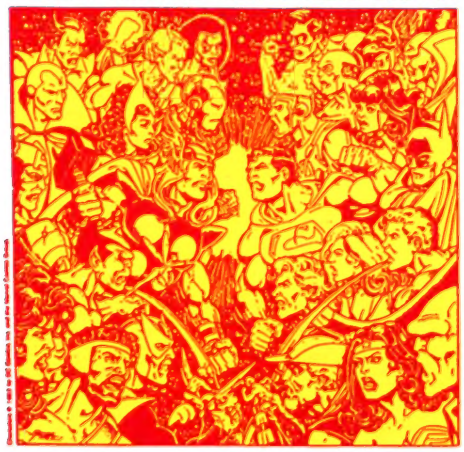

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